

Metaphorical Traces of *the Sun and Light* in Latvian Language and Culture

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Abstract

The paper explores metaphorical traces within the cognitive linguistic framework and examines metaphorical networks in language, created by a cultural concept or a social event. In the cognitive view, our thinking, perception and experiences are basically metaphorical, which determines the interrelationship between thought, culture and language in the process of conceptualisation, resulting in a metaphorical representation in the human mind and its expression in language. Figurative language does not only reflect everyday individual or collective vision, but also testifies to past events, our values, beliefs and attitudes. Most of the abstract notions, phenomena and events are mapped in language in terms of metaphors. Many conceptual metaphors may be traced back to more ancient or recent periods, they may disappear altogether or may change their meaning in the course of evolution. The paper analyses the Latvian concept *gaismas pils* (castle/palace of light) and metaphors based on the concept “light”. It also illustrates nonlinguistic realisation of metaphor in social-cultural practice. Metaphor creation is examined on the basis of the Latvian conceptual metaphor *LABUMS IR SAULE* (goodness is the sun), covering a span since time immemorial up to the present day. The established conceptual metaphor generates concrete linguistic metaphors (both lexical and phraseological), which can be traced back to the original concept that has developed, securing diachronic conceptual continuity. New linguistic metaphors emerge in the evolution of the conceptual metaphor. The image of the sun has evolved into a cultural symbol; it is part of Latvian cultural heritage and the Latvian mindset.

1 Introduction

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphorical conceptualisation is a fundamental capacity of the mind. Metaphors pervade and structure many aspects of language and culture (see Gibbs, 1994). Kövesces argues that cognitive science and linguistics must explicitly and systematically embrace the study of both embodiment and cultural systems in their pursuit of human cognition. “It is not possible to study the mind in a serious way without the study of culture” (Kövesces, 2005). In the cognitive linguistic view, culture is generally seen as a set of shared understandings that characterise smaller or larger

groups of people. In this paper, we follow Kövesces' argumentation that metaphors are both cultural and cognitive entities (Kövesces, 2005: 11).

The essential role of metaphor in both cognition and culture largely accounts for the link between language and culture, which helps us to understand the ways perceptions and experiences of the people, and their social-cultural practices are echoed in metaphorical language. The memory of the events is retained, it can be traced back in the history of the people, its language and culture.

2 Memory and Culture

In the modern world, information space has become immense and people frequently lose their bearings; they try to find their own place, a niche where they can discover their own existence and understanding of the world. In this case, memory plays a significant role in the process of cognition, as it is an important aspect of the mind. Memory can be compared to a surface where human beings wish to leave some traces or delete their footprints. Memory may retain some images for a long time or else they may cease to exist, or change their representation. In other words, memory works in a dynamic space. A person's identity is certainly shaped by his/her biographical memory, the memory of his/her family, his/her nationality etc. In the 20th century a new term has emerged – “collective memory”, which has acquired a social and culturological meaning (Halbwachs, [1950] 1980; see also Assmann [1988] 1995; Bragina, 2007: 16-17). Collective memory is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive (Halbwachs, [1950] 1980). This is an extended view of the notion of memory. Assmann proposes a theory of culture memory, thus he singles out culture memory and communicative memory. Communicative memory is closer connected with the everyday experience of a person and mutual communication, however, it is not so lasting. Culture memory is more formal, its roots can be traced back into time immemorial; it has been recorded in texts, pictures and buildings (Assmann, 2004). Culture memory is an uninterrupted process, it shapes and strengthens the identity of a society: it does not only preserve past values but it also realises them. Today it is also called social memory, because memory is structured by collectively held ideas and by experiences shared with others (Fentress, 1992, 7 - 47).

Collective memory is of great importance in shaping a personality and the whole society; The past is evidenced in various forms; it is part of our reality. It has been recorded in written form and it is manifest in art and literature. The collective and the individual forms of memory may often differ; one and the same period of history or a culture event may be interpreted in different ways.

Language has a crucial role in this process; it offers a huge space for cognition, mapping human thought and everyday experience. Language gives an insight into culture, both individual experience and collective memory. The external world and the processes, which go on in the world, are conceptualised in the human mind, and language reflects them in figurative terms, that is, by figurative means (see Gibbs, 1994; Pimenova, 2006). Gibbs emphasises the poetic structure of mind: metaphor, metonymy, irony, oxymoron, and other tropes are a basic frame; these are principles, which underlie the way people think, reason and imagine (1994: 2-5). When exploring conceptual metaphors, cognitive linguists point out that most of them are of universal character (Lakoff and Johnson, [1980]

2003; Kövecses, 2005). Universal concepts, such as space, time, senses, freedom, work, goodness, evil and many others, can be found in all languages, and hence in thought. There exist certain concepts of culture, which frequently are reflected in language in figurative terms, usually as metaphors of metonymies, or their interaction. The same conceptual metaphor may appear in different linguistic forms. Collective memory needs to balance a number of viewpoints, therefore it can be easily structured in metaphors. When tracing the roots of metaphors back in time, we can trace the heritage of world culture, the development of thought and its metamorphoses.

Concepts may vary in each culture. This is determined by the system of values, and the perception of time and space. Kövecses examines the interaction between conceptual metaphor and cultural models¹ (2005: 193-195). In cognitive linguistics it is called cross-cultural² variation or cross-cultural diversity. When exploring and comparing metaphors in different languages, it is possible to reveal their characteristic features and the figurative modes of thought of the people.

3 The Concept of the Sun: Its Evolution in the Latvian Language and Culture

We can study the evolution of a concept through its innumerable reflections and manifestations throughout centuries. In Latvian heritage, the image of the sun is vital for both language and culture, it can be traced back to time immemorial, that is, the prehistoric time: the Late Neolithic Period and the Mesolithic Period, when ornaments and ceramics bear solar symbolism, which is part of the so-called Latvian patterns (see Zemītis, 2004). As the sun is the main heavenly body, its symbolism is powerful. For the Latvian collective mindset the sun is omniscient and omnipresent³, it is the bearer of life and light. The Latvian culture memory has kept the symbol of the sun in folk songs, fairy tales and folk tales as a deity, the housekeeper and the bearer of light. Hence, the symbol of the sun plays an important part for Latvian culture memory: it reveals the continuity and the depth of the cultural process. It reminds us of the ancient times and it complements the present cultural processes. In the contemporary understanding, the image of the sun has remained as powerful, and its meaning has been extended. It has acquired an ethical, aesthetic and social sense. This has been explored by Viķe-Freiberga in her three books “*Trejādas saules*” (Three Kinds of the Sun) (Viķe-Freiberga, 1997; Viķe-Freiberga, 1999b; Viķe-Freiberga, 2002), and also in her book “*Saules zīmes*” (Sun Signs), which all reveal the traditions of Latvian sun songs, their characteristic features and their mythical, symbolic and metaphorical significance (Viķe-Freiberga, 1999a: 23).

Of late, the image of the sun is frequently chosen as a symbol for various cultural events. It lends the event a new symbolic dimension; it also makes an emotional impact on the public. The sun embodies a sense of unity both in its linguistic and nonlinguistic manifestations. In 2008 the title of the final concert of the All-Latvian Song and Dance Festival was “*Latvija – Saules zeme*” (Latvia – the Land of

¹By cultural models Kövecses understands any coherent organisations of human experience shared by people (Kövecses, 2005: 193).

² On cross-cultural variation of conceptual metaphors, see Kövecses, 2005: 67-87; Pimenova, 2006: 172-188.

³ Interestingly, *saule* (the sun) also functions as part of a number of compound nouns which designate important notions for the Latvian mindset and Latvian mythology: *pasaule* (the world), *viņsaule* (the other world; the beyond), *aizsaule* (life beyond death).

the Sun). As the Head Conductor of the Festival Māris Sirmais points out, “Latvians are a people with a complicated history, traditions, language and, folk songs and music. For us Latvia is a bright land of the Sun. The Sun is timeless in human perception, the Sun as a world centre, the Sun as a symbol of awakening, as the bearer of all goodness”⁴ (Dziesmu un deju svētki, 2008). In his speech the reference to the image of the sun comes from culture memory, lends depth to his speech and establishes an unconscious link with the roots of the nation, serving as a tool of socialisation.

Symbols in general and cultural symbols in particular are frequently grounded in well-entrenched metaphors in a culture. To understand a symbol means to be able to see the conceptual metaphor that the symbol evokes (see Kövesces, 2005: 172). Metaphors and symbols are both based on similarity; however, symbols complement language by replacement, they do not compare but identify notions (Arutyunova, 1990: 22-26). The symbol of the sun is a manifestation of the conceptual metaphor LABUMS IR SAULE (goodness is the sun), which we believe exists in Latvian thought and language. It can be best traced in many of the innumerable Latvian folk songs. For instance:

<i>Saulīt' silta, māmiņ' jauka,</i>	The Sun's so warm, Mama so kind,
<i>Abas vienu labumiņu:</i>	Both are of equal goodness:
<i>No saulītes silti rīti,</i>	The Sun gives warm mornings,
<i>No māmiņas mīļi vārdi.</i>	Mama – gentle words ⁵ .
<i>Krišjāņa Barona Dainu skapis 3234</i>	Krišjānis Barons' Folk Song Cabinet No 3234

However, it is not only archeological artifacts and Latvian folklore, which bear witness to the importance of the sun in Latvian Culture. We can also study its evolution through various innumerable reflections and manifestations in the system of language through centuries. The Latvian phraseological stock contains many phraseological units which testify to the folk vision of the worth and goodness of the sun, e.g.

iecelt/pacelt saulē/saulītē (to place, to raise someone in the sun) – to create very good conditions
vēlēt saules mūžu (to wish someone a lifetime of the sun) – to wish someone a long life
saulains smaids (a sunny smile) – a kind, friendly smile

The goodness of the sun is also manifest in set expressions, which are linguistic instantiations in everyday use. Importantly, goodness goes together with a happy tonality⁶:

saulaina noskaņa (a sunny atmosphere/frame of mind)
saulains noskaņojums (a sunny mood)
saulains bērns (a sunny child)

⁴ Underlined by the authors.

⁵ Latvian folk songs have not been translated into English. This is an attempt of the authors to render the contents in prose. English is iambic while Latvian folk songs are written in trochee or dactyl. The difference in rhythm, original imagery and an abundance of diminutives (these four lines contain five diminutives) make Latvian folk songs practically untranslatable.

⁶ This meaning of the adjective “sunny” also exists in other languages (cf.: the English a sunny disposition - happy, well-wishing, warm); however, the difference lies in its incidence and the frequency of use.

saularini novēlējumi jaunajām māmiņām (sunny wishes to the young mummies)

The present development of the language reveals threads of conceptual continuity: the established conceptual metaphor generates linguistic metaphors, which are networked to the base concept (Trim, 2007: 60). This is clearly seen in the use of the concept of the sun in advertising, which has been a recent trend in Latvian, e.g. *Saulaino cenu bums! 50% atlaides!* (A boom of sunny prices! A 50% discount!) This is an advertisement of the travel agency *Latvia Tours*, August, 2008. The boom in prices is sunny, it is a benefit, as it means a discount of 50 %, accompanied by free tickets for children.

Throughout centuries conceptual metaphors have been materialised in nonlinguistic ways. As cognitive linguists have proved it, they do not only exist in thought and language, but also in a tangible way, in social-physical practice and reality (see Kövesces, 2005: 163-169). Moreover, it is not only in archeological artifacts in prehistoric times but more importantly also in folk art and craft which has been alive and vibrant. We find nonlinguistic reflections of the Latvian mindset, including the concept of the sun in painting, sculpture, weaving, tapestry, knitwear, woodcraft, metalwork, ceramics – all created today and used today.

As a conceptual pattern, goodness of the sun is relevant for the Latvian mindset. The image of the sun appears in various types of social-cultural activities, events and practices, e.g. *Saules dejas* (Sun Dances), which are enacted during the Song and Dance Festivals and which emerge in poetry.

The goodness of the sun acquired a visual representation when the President of the Republic of Latvia Mrs. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga left office after eight years of service: This is an aerial view of the visual representation. It is a gift of the people of Latvia conveying the very best wishes to the



President. In gratitude they organized a special event on 1 July, 2007, called *Saules ziedi* (The Flowers of the Sun) and arranged a huge floral representation of the sun on a slope in *Dainu kalns* (Folk Song Hill) in the Gauja National Park.

Thus, in the history of Latvian thought and language the conceptual metaphor GOODNESS IS THE SUN has not only acquired a linguistic dimension but it also possesses an important cultural dimension (see Kövesces, 2002: 241).

4 The Concept *gaismas pils*⁷: A Feature of Latvian History and Mindset

Each culture produces varying underlying conceptual metaphors, which create varied types of metaphoric networks (Trim, 2007: 219). They leave their traces in the evolution of figurative thought and language. The concepts, which endure and which are adapted in the language, correspond to the mindset of the people. These concepts are extended, as the cognition process of the world is never-

⁷ The word *pils* is polysemous in Latvian: 1) a castle; 2) a palace. It has given rise to a number of derivatives, e.g. *pilsēta* (a town), *pilsonis* (a citizen), *pilsonība* (citizenship).

ending; the world keeps changing and new cultural processes emerge and with them new features and attitudes.

Research into concepts and symbols, which lie at the basis of enduring metaphors, brings out their complicated character. Their origins are frequently rooted in olden days; in the course of time they get overlaid with changes of the subsequent periods, however, culture memory preserves the traces of the original source. For instance, the phraseological unit⁸ *gaismas pils* (the castle/palace of light) reflects a search for identity in the past cultural heritage; today it has also acquired other meanings, even contradictory connotations. It takes its source in Latvian tales and legends. In the 13th century, the Latvian territory was subjugated by the Livonian Order, which destroyed the ancient Latvian castles. However, castle mounds remained and gave birth to folk tales about sunken castles. Many folk tales herald the possible rise of a castle, provided a certain task is fulfilled or someone guesses the name of the castle. These legends and tales were also subsequently influenced by the Christian tradition (see Ancelāne, 1988: 8).

It was in the second half of the 19th century that *gaismas pils* acquired a new symbolic significance during the period of Latvian enlightenment or national awakening as it is called in Latvia. One of the main objectives of the New Latvians was to awaken the national self-consciousness of the Latvian people and shape their national culture and identity. As Smith points out, the notions of a nation and nationalism need to be interpreted as a culture phenomenon, as it is linked with national identity, which is a multi-dimensional concept. It needs to be extended to include language and symbols (Smith, 1991). Auseklis, who was a representative of national romanticism and a participant of the awakening movement, was inspired by the ancient folk tale about the sunken castle at Jaunpils. In 1873 he wrote the poem “*Gaismas pils*”. In 1889 Jāzeps Vītols composed a choral song to the lyrics of Auseklis’ poem, which has become the culmination of all the subsequent Song Festivals. The sunken castle of light symbolises the lost freedom and the spiritual heritage of olden times:

<i>Ātri grima, ātri zuda</i>	The stately castle on the Hill of Light
<i>Gaismas kalna staltā pils.</i>	Sank fast and vanished fast.
<i>Tur guļ mūsu tēvu dievi,</i>	The Gods of our fathers lie there:
<i>Tautas gara greznumi.</i>	The spiritual splendour of our people.

When the name of the ancient castle was guessed, it would rise from below the hill:

<i>Ja kas vārdu uzminētu,</i>	If someone guessed the name of the old castle,
<i>Augšā celtos vecā pils!</i>	It would rise,
<i>Tālu laistu tautas slavu,</i>	Spreading the fame of the people
<i>Gaismas starus margodam’.</i>	And radiating rays of light.

There are a number of folk tales about the sunken Burtnieki Castle. In 1888 Andrejs Pumpurs wrote the epic poem “*Lāčplēsis*”, drawing upon Latvian folk tales and history, and viewing it as a testimony

⁸ The phraseological unit is a stable, cohesive combination of words with a fully or partly figurative meaning. For our understanding of the basic terms in phraseology, see Naciscione (2001).

to the common heritage of the Latvian people. The main message of the poem is that man cannot live without freedom, he cannot improve without collective memory, without knowing or cognising his own past and the past of his nation. In the second canto Lāčplēsis⁹ goes to Burtņieki Castle. He says, “I have come here sent by my father to learn at The School of Wisdom of the Famous *Burtņieki*”. The word *burtņieks*¹⁰ means a holder of the knowledge of ancient signs while the castle is a holder of the spiritual heritage of the people (Rudzītis 1988: 285). Thus, the poet sees the castle as a symbol of the people’s wisdom. In the third canto, Lāčplēsis spends a night in the Old Burtņieki Castle, conquering the evil spirits and overcoming the power of darkness. He raises the castle from Lake Burtņieki. The castle will bring people light and the spiritual treasures of their forefathers.

The literary pieces, created in the 19th century, are not merely part of Latvian literature; over time their characters and plots have been retained in the Latvian language and culture, they have acquired new interesting and variegated manifestations. The original figurative expressions become part of the system of language; hence, cultural elements have an important role in the formation of a given conceptual system (see Dobrovol’skiy and Piirainen, 2005: 90). The sunken palace of light has remained a symbol of freedom to the present day. In the age of globalisation we still feel the traces of the past. The modern cultural and everyday discourse contains references to the romanticised castle of light and the symbol of the sunken castle, created by the New Latvians. In the new reality the cultural heritage of the past seems to foster the spiritual unity of the people.

We may come to the conclusion that the image of the castle of light is deeply entrenched in Latvian figurative thought. There is sufficient substantiation to single out the conceptual metaphors *BRĪVĪBA IR GAISMA* (freedom is light) and *NEBRĪVE¹¹ IR TUMSA* (captivity is darkness). These metaphors have emerged as a result of spiritual experience and cognition, and Latvian collective memory has preserved and consolidated them.

Lakoff and Johnson distinguish spatial or orientational metaphors¹², which represent our orientation in the world and which are based on the binary opposition UP–DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson, [1980] 2003: 15-16). The concept *brīvība* (freedom) tends upwards; as Auseklis puts it, “The Castle of Light rose up”, while “The stately castle on the Hill of Light sank fast and vanished fast”, which is a representation of *nebrīve* (captivity) as a downward movement.

The year 2008 when the Republic of Latvia celebrated its 90th anniversary saw a number of manifestations of the conceptual metaphor *BRĪVĪBA IR GAISMA* (freedom is light) both in its linguistic and nonlinguistic forms. In honour of the 15th anniversary of the Latvian Museum of Occupation, it was decided to build an extension which would bear the name “The Hall of the Future” to symbolise the transition from the dark past to the bright future (see *Latvijas Okupācijas muzejs*, 2008). Two new mottoes appeared within the framework of the festive events: *Staro, Rīga!* (Radiate Light, Riga!) and *Iededzies par Latviju!* (Lights on for Latvia!). Both of them proceed from the

⁹ Lāčplēsis is a Latvian national hero who features in many literary pieces. He is usually seen as chosen by the Gods to save his people. Etymologically his name means “a bear tearer”: he was so strong that he could take a bear by his jaws and tear him apart.

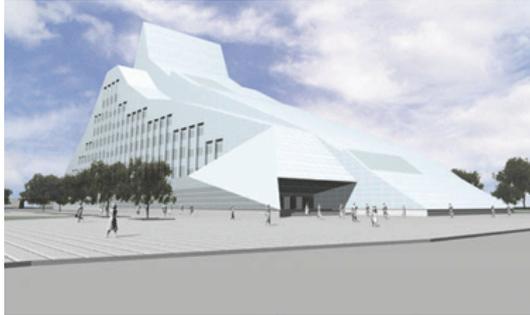
¹⁰ Etymologically the word *burtņieks* comes from *burts* – a letter.

¹¹ The literal meaning of *nebrīve* is “non-freedom”.

¹² Lakoff and Johnson single out a number of orientational metaphors that convey a concept of spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral (Lakoff and Johnson, [1980] 2003: 14). For the verbalisation of the spatial metaphors *centre-periphery*, see Teters, 2009.

conceptual metaphor *BRĪVĪBA IR GAISMA* (freedom is light). “Radiate Light, Riga!” is the name of the first Festival of Light in Riga, which featured lighting up the most prominent buildings of Riga. The events of the Festival also included a symbolic installation of the future National Library created by beams of light. “Lights on for Latvia!” was a state jubilee motto that was used not only during official events but also by the public at large.

The castle of light is a container, which embodies the spiritual heritage of the people. The symbolic rise of the castle signifies spiritual perfection, a road to enlightenment. It is not by chance that the building of the new library bears the noble name *Gaismas pils* (architect Gunnar Birkets). The new



palace of light is designed to be seen as a bearer of light and a treasure house for knowledge for the Latvian people. The name of the library conveys both the ancient idea of the castle of light as a treasure house of spiritual heritage, which has been preserved throughout centuries, and a future vision: to erect a new beautiful and functional building,

that would also create unified library information space, which has acquired the name of *Gaismas tīkls* (a network of light). Thus, the phenomenon of metaphorical traces is a reflection of metaphor creation as an ongoing, timeless and regular process (see Trim, 2007: 4-9).

5 Conclusion

Both conceptual and linguistic metaphors emerge within the framework of the system of values of a given society, and they are used unconsciously. Conceptual metaphors are based on human perception, their everyday experience and vision: this is cognition space where people perceive the world around them through their personal prism; it is also influenced by the social environment where people live, and their culture. The interaction of culture and language is evident. It is frequently the collective cultural identity that influences the creation of a concept (see Bragina, 2007: 325-326). In language, cultural concepts tend to emerge in terms of metaphor. The cognitive processes are not merely ways of accounting for meaning in language; they are ways of accounting for meaning in many aspects of our social and cultural reality. Extension of conceptual metaphor in time is a cognitive process. By exploring metaphorical traces, we are able to uncover diachronic conceptual continuity and “the subtleties of human meaning-making practices shaped by a variety of linguistic and nonlinguistic sources” (Gibbs, 2008: 5).

Thus, the concepts of the sun and the castle/palace of light have left their traces in the evolution of Latvian figurative thought and culture. Today they have remained active concepts in Latvian thought and culture in various manifestations: they are realised in both language and social-cultural practice. They are key cultural concepts, an inherent part of the Latvian mindset.

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