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SOME CHALLENGES OF METAPHOR AND METONYMY INTERPRETATION

O NIEKTÓRYCH TRUDNOŚCIACH ZWIĄZANYCH Z INTERPRETACJĄ METAFORY I METONIMII

ABSTRACT: The essential idea of this paper is that the framework of cognitive linguistics – conceptual analysis and conceptual metaphor – enables a more comprehensive and precise insight into lexico-semantic research. Some lexicological phenomena, such as mechanisms for generating new meanings of lexemes (lexical metaphor and metonymy), can be better observed from a more profound perspective, provided by conceptual metaphor and metonymy. This insight has motivated the bold hypothesis presented in this paper: namely, verbal or adjectival metaphor and metonymy seem not to exist; all cases of metaphor and metonymy are actually nominal. In lexical relations established in phrases, the verb and the adjective simply adapt to the noun in order to activate the metaphorical or metonymical dispersion of the given noun.

KEYWORDS: verbal metaphor, verbal metonymy, adjectival metaphor, adjectival metonymy, polysemy, eurysemy, conceptual analysis, componential analysis

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: metafora werbalna, metonimia werbalna, metafora przymiotnikowa, metonimia przymiotnikowa, polisemia, eurysemia, analiza pojęciowa, analiza składnikowa

Searching for the core of a metaphor

The idea behind this paper stems from a conversation that the author held with the most experienced Serbian lexicologist and lexicographer, Darinka Gortan Premk, a university professor and long-time editor of the academy dictionary of the Serbian language published by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In terms of semantic analysis and the theoretical approach to lexicography, Professor Gortan Premk is a staunch supporter of componential analysis and structuralist stances in general, while being somewhat sceptical towards cognitive linguistics. The mentioned debate was centred around the metaphor present in a newspaper headline – PROFIT MELTS PROMISES¹. This paper's author, taking cognitivist stances as the starting point, claimed that the whole image should be understood metaphorically, by conceptualising PROFIT as a FORCE (or as a MAN) having the power to melt promises, whereas PROMISE was conceptualised as meltable MATTER. For this metaphorical image to be established, the verb *melt* was used in its primary sense – 'to turn into a liquid under the influence of heat, to smelt'; e.g., *to melt metal*, *to melt lard*. Professor Gortan Premk categorically rejected this interpretation, claiming completely the opposite – in her opinion, it was just the verb *to melt* that was used metaphorically – 'to make something thinner, smaller or less numerous, to make something disappear'; e.g., *melt someone's expectations, hopes* and so on. According to her, both nouns were used in their primary senses. Thus, *profit* was no force, man or such, but meant 'earnings', while *promise* was not matter but 'a given word that something will be done.' To justify her view, Professor Gortan Premk referred to dictionary definitions, asserting that her approach only could be lexicographically analysed. There was not a single dictionary of any language, she pointed out, where *profit* was defined as a melting force, and *promise* as meltable matter. On the contrary, dictionaries of all world languages record the verb *melt* in its metaphorical, secondary sense as well, meaning 'to decrease, to gradually disappear' (even when referring to abstract notions). This sense was enabled by the softening seme which the verb *melt* contains in its primary sense, and softening, in the abstract sense of the word, leads to lower intensity, weakening and disappearance.

Polysemy and eurysemy

What prevents cognitive linguists from accepting such a logical explanation offered by Professor Gortan Premk? To answer this question, it is necessary to start from cognitive linguistics' fundamental premise – conceptualisation. Essentially,

¹ This problem was touched upon in *Leksikologija srpskog jezika* [The Lexicology of the Serbian Language] (Dragičević 2010, p. 150).

this means that language provides ample evidence of the fact that abstract notions cannot be accessed directly, straightforwardly, but indirectly, by being reduced to concrete ones. For such an approach to the understanding of various phenomena, it is unacceptable to interpret an image as being composed of abstract elements exclusively (*profit*, *melting*, *promise*). Instead, the image should be reduced to familiar experience, which entails the reverse process – the concretisation of all elements of the image. This is why *profit* is personified, *promise* is concretised as matter, and *melting* is a concrete, visible activity of transforming matter from the solid to the liquid state.

Hence, the nouns were semantically transferred from the abstract to the concrete sphere, while the verb remained in the concrete sphere. A verb conforms to nouns. What part of a verb's wide semantic scope will be activated depends on the noun. The same holds for adjectives, which always conform grammatically and semantically to nouns. Phenomena expressed with nouns are more dominant than those expressed with verbs and adjectives, which is easily noticed in conceptual metaphor interpretation. Besides, nouns denote objects, whose concrete/abstract nature can be clearly determined, which cannot be said of verbs, which denote processes and states, or of adjectives, which denote nominal properties; processes, states and properties are always abstract, even when the verb or adjective has a seemingly concrete meaning.

The thing that is distinctive for verbs and adjectives is eurysemy, which is significantly different from polysemy, characteristic of nouns. The relevant sources explain eurysemy as typical of certain nouns, adjectives and verbs, and I would rather explain it (for now, this is merely a hypothesis) as a characteristic of probably all or most adjectives and verbs, and not of nouns.

The first papers introducing the term *eurysemy* (of Greek origin, literally 'the broadness of meaning') were published in the 1960s. The term was introduced by N.N. Amosova (1963). In Russian sources, the concept is known as *эврисемия*, while the Serbian theoretical literature uses *platisemija* (platysemy)². M.F. Pankina explains the use of a eurysemic word in the following way:

A polysemic word has several meanings. When used, the context helps the realisation of one of these meanings. On the other hand, a eurysemic word has one meaning only; however, this meaning denotes different concepts. The word has a broad semantic reference, its conceptual scope is wide, and the concrete content is specified (but does not change) according to the context (Pankina 2013, p. 7).

Pankina emphasises that what is specific about eurysemic units is that they have a broad, undetermined referential sphere, and that they are characterised by

² This term was introduced in Serbian linguistics by Irena Grickat (Grickat 1967).

content fuzziness (Pankina 2013, p. 8). Some of these lexemes have such broad meanings that, according to some authors, they are on the verge of being desemanticised. Pankina and other researchers do not agree, as they do not recognise desemanticisation in eurysemy. Pankina illustrates her claim with the English word *thing* or *вещь* in Russian; she says that these words retain the meaning of an object regardless of the various contexts they can be found in. Eurysemy, the author observes, is addressed from a non-linguistic perspective, as a result of the accumulation of different phenomena and extralinguistic facts in language. Pankina (2013, p. 10) believes that eurysemy is characterised by polydenotation, the phenomenon where a single word has infinite denotations. Earlier, V. Kolobajev (1983) too used the terms *polydenotation* and *synsemanticism* in his description of the semantics of eurysemic lexemes. In addition, there has been some research focused on individual examples of eurysemic verbs, which linguists used to explain the concept of eurysemy. For example, N. V. Litvinova (2016) describes the semantic potential of the eurysemic verb *to work* in English, German, French and Italian, pointing to the fact that eurysemy is a common phenomenon in many languages.

We can therefore conclude that in the newspaper headline **PROFIT MELTS PROMISES** the verb has not been transformed, unlike the nouns. We can even go a step further and put forth the bold assumption that verbs and adjectives in general, as noun-dependent words, do not develop their meanings through polysemy, but through eurysemy (platysemy) instead. In other words, adjectives and verbs can be eurysemic, not polysemic. It was only cognitive linguistics that enabled us to realise this, forcing us to access metaphor by observing the wider context which points to lexical and conceptual relations in a novel way. In semantic analysis, we do not take the word-by-word approach but consider sentences and even longer linguistic passages instead. Sometimes the metaphorical nature of a lexeme is noticed even when the metaphor is not expressed; it is rather understood. For example, we extract the **LOVE IS A JOURNEY** metaphor from the sentence *Look how far we've come!* if we know that it was taken from a conversation about a romantic relationship.

The erroneous proposition about the identical semantic development of nouns, on the one hand, and adjectives and verbs on the other, has been greatly influenced by dictionaries which list the meanings of lexemes one after another, in horizontal or vertical strings, which do not allow for the interrelation between them to be recognised or for the relation between the lexeme's meaning and usage to be identified precisely enough. I. Grickat (1967) regarded polysemy as a dynamic, evolutionary relation, while she saw eurysemy (platysemy) as static. It should be noted that this fact cannot be illustrated by dictionaries, for, according to I. Grickat, the proper way of indicating all meanings of an adjective – e.g.,

velik ('big' in Serbian), which, according to the most comprehensive dictionary of the Serbian language, has as many as 29 meanings – would be to analyse all of them as primary meanings. Writing about the semantics of this adjective, I. Grickat stated that:

all these meanings [...] are actually the possible realisations of the different nominations of the same fundamental concept, dependent on the word that this fundamental concept is in contact with (Grickat 1967, p. 22).

This idea about the semantics of eurysemic lexemes (i.e. adjectives and verbs!), whose meanings are simply the different potential realisations of a single fundamental concept, modified in compliance with the word, i.e. noun (!) which the fundamental concept is in contact with, is extremely important.

An argument that justifies our doubt in the possibility of metaphorical and metonymical semantic dispersion of adjectives and verbs can be found in poetic metonymy and synecdoche research. Cf. "Ever since antiquity, poetic metonymy and synecdoche have been linked to nouns exclusively" (Kovačević 1999, p. 173). Indeed, figures of speech are not discussed in this paper, but metaphor and metonymy as cognitive mechanisms (conceptual metaphor and metonymy) and linguistic mechanisms (lexical metaphor and metonymy). Nevertheless, this fact cannot be ignored, for the manner of dispersion is the same at every level, and there should not be any significant variation in relation to this. Obviously, ancient thinkers felt that "true" examples of metonymical transformation can be found only among nouns.

Verbal metaphor?

A glance at any dictionary of conceptual metaphors or a list of conceptual metaphors in a monograph analysing this topic can demonstrate the problematic nature of the notions of verbal metaphor and adjectival metaphor. Let us take the list of conceptual metaphors given at the end of a monograph by Serbian linguist Duška Klikovac (2004) as an example. The list contains about 500 conceptual metaphors, all related to the metaphorisation of nominal concepts (e.g. ARGUMENTATION IS A JOURNEY, THE WHOLE IS A CIRCLE, EMOTIONS ARE MATTER UNDER PRESSURE, THOUGHTS ARE PHYSICAL ENTITIES, THOUGHTS ARE FOOD)³.

A closer look at some examples which serve as a basis for establishing these conceptual metaphors suggests the same; e.g. *He's received good news and now he is floating*. The verb *to float* was used here in its primary sense, not metaphorically; its purpose is to enable the linguistic realisation of the conceptual metaphors

³ Orientational conceptual metaphors are the only exception (GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN, BETTER IS FORWARD, THE BETTER ONE IS IN THE FRONT).

HAPPINESS IS FLOATING and HAPPINESS IS UP. Therefore, it was not the verbal concept that was metaphorised but the nominal one. *She's gone crazy about him* can be used to describe a woman in love. This is one of the typical examples of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS MADNESS, because LOVE is metaphorised, and the verb is there only to enable the metaphor to be linguistically manifested. Let us observe the following example, too: *He exploded with anger*. This is a typical example of the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. For this conceptualisation to be manifested in language, the verb *to explode* is necessary (used in the primary sense of the word); this verb helps the linguistic realisation of the image of ANGER spurting out of the BODY (metaphorised as a container) in the form of a hot liquid under great pressure.

Verbal metonymy?

Although I will not try to present the references on verbal metonymy in this paper, I will highlight the fact that these are much scarcer than the references on nominal metonymy. As a rule, in cognitive linguistics handbooks, the examples mentioned in chapters tackling metonymy all refer to nominal metonymy. For example, W. Croft and D.A. Cruse (2004, p. 217) explain metonymy via 15 examples which are all realisations of nominal metonymy only.

Ū. D. Apresĭan (1995, p. 203–211) observes that the “regular polysemy of verbs” (his term for verbal metonymy) often goes unnoticed in dictionaries, where multiple meanings of the same verb are treated as one. Of course, this does not come as a surprise, as the multiple uses of a common meaning should indeed be noted in all such cases. The following are examples which Apresĭan mentions: *to dig (earth – a pit)*, *to cook (potatoes – soup)*, *to squeeze (a lemon – the juice out of a lemon)*, *to scrape (a birch tree – the bark of a birch tree)*, *to dig (through a mountain – a tunnel)*, *to cure (a patient – tuberculosis)*, *to sew up (a bag – a hole)*, *to crop (the head – hair)*, *to empty (a bag – the flour out of the bag)*, *wipe (one's face – the sweat off one's face)*.

The actions of *squeezing a lemon* and *squeezing the juice out of a lemon* are completely the same, just as there is no difference in the meaning of the verb *to cook* in the examples *to cook potato soup* and *to cook potatoes*. The only difference is in the perspective from which we view the same process. It is as if we moved the spotlight shedding light on the event farther away, and then brought it closer again. In the former case, the spotlight is far away, and the action is viewed from a greater height; in the latter case, the action looks a bit different, since the spotlight is brought closer, revealing the details of the action.

Serbian linguist Milka Ivić was a scholar who studied the link between human perception and lexical meaning most profoundly of all Serbian linguists.

She started from the idea of Japanese linguist S. Hattori that people look at the same thing, but do not see the same thing:

Oftentimes, we are not able to notice the characteristic semantic nuance of a foreign verb, even though the native speakers of the given language performed the action denoted by that verb before our eyes, for we pay attention to certain properties, while they pay attention to some other properties of the demonstrated action (Ivić 1995, p. 214).

Later on, this author writes that lexemes may have different “denotative centres” in different languages, as well as unclear “denotative boundaries”. Could Milka Ivić have been on the same track as some Russian linguists, who wrote about “polydenotation” or “synsemanticism” as the main feature of eurysemy?

Verbs are used to express actions made up of separate segments, which often do not have individual denotations, and the common verbal lexeme always marks only one of these segments; this may or may not be revealed from the context. Thus, for instance, the verb *to fry* denotes the actions of (1) pouring oil into a pan, (2) heating the oil, (3) preparing the steak which will end up in the pan, (4) lowering the steak into the pan, (5) flipping over the steak in the hot oil, (6) adding more oil, if necessary, (7) adding spices and (8) taking the fried steak out of the pan. All these activities are separate and different, yet they are covered by a single verb. This is why this verb is considered a eurysemic or polydenotative word. Over the course of the action, the denotative centre shifts from segment to segment; however, this does not mean that the new segment should be connected with the previous one through supposed metonymical transformation, as there is no metonymical transformation in this case.

Ťu. D. Apresian (1995, p. 208) recognises a special category of verbal metonymy based on the *action – condition* formula, for instance: *the horn is blowing – to blow a horn; the pen writes – to write in pen, the knife cuts – to cut with a knife; the eyes blink – to blink one’s eyes, the car is slowing down – to slow down the car*, etc. The same action is adequately named by the same verb, which is used in the same sense in both cases. In terms of syntax, of course, these constructions cannot be deemed identical; nevertheless, the verb *to slow down* means exactly the same if the action is viewed from the perspective of the car or from that of the car driver. These are two different applications of the same meaning – one meaning only!⁴

⁴ This approach is close to cognitive linguistics, and M. Stanojević gave an excellent summary of it (Stanojević 2013) while writing about profiling and the level of detail as important concepts in cognitive linguistics: “Profiling refers to the choice of a prominent part of a certain domain or scene” (Stanojević 2013, p. 40). The author provides two examples: *The perpetrator broke the front windscreen of the Opel Vectra with a radio device* and *the broken windscreen*. He then comments that the examples differ in profiling, adding that “[i]n the same event, we focused on two different phenomena (because of the different communicative needs) – we profiled either the whole correlation of the agent, instrument and theme, or just the result of the given action.”

Special attention should be paid to the most challenging case for this analysis, what is known as *simple lexico-semantic verbal metonymy*⁵. N. Ageeva (1990) gives the following examples, among others: *to blush* → *to be embarrassed*; *to sweat* → *to work hard*; *to lie down* → *to rest*; *to breathe* → *to live*, etc. As it has been emphasised already, most verbs have a broad meaning covering several stages, and there is a prototypical manifestation scenario for every verb and adjective⁶. Some of these stages can be named, others cannot. Sometimes, for the sake of expressive communication, a certain stage or a prominent sequence of a scenario is brought to the fore, but the verbs still retain their primary meanings. Namely, one really blushes when embarrassed, and indeed sweats when working hard, and actually breathes while alive. This is why it is not enough to say *I'm blushing* if the intended meaning is *I'm embarrassed*, but what needs to be said is *I'm blushing with embarrassment*. Even if the complement is not uttered, it is implied. When the PART → WHOLE transformation is applied to a nominal concept, the semantic transformation can be readily identified, since the statement is nonsensical at the level of primary meanings, e.g. *It was a large farm, with over twenty hired hands*. When such a transformation is attempted with a verb, e.g. *He blushes when she is around*, the sentence is meaningful, as it expresses something real, which only needs to be specified with an adverbial clause of reason: *He blushes when she is around because she has humiliated him, and now he is embarrassed / because she has insulted him, and now he wants to get back at her / because he is in love with her, so he gets excited*, etc. Therefore, in all these examples, the verb *to blush* was used in the primary sense of the word, not metonymically, and it denoted a stage of the more comprehensive verbal action.

The author explains the level of detail taking cherries as an example. Cherries can be viewed either from an everyday perspective, when we pick or buy them and remove the stalks and stones, or from the perspective of large companies that produce them or buy them from the farmers and freeze them. These two perspectives can be seen in grammar too – when viewed from the everyday perspective, the plural noun is used (cherries), but when viewed from the estranged, mass perspective of the producer, cherries are seen as a mass noun, used only in its singular form (the cherry). “Such a shift of perspective is called the level of detail” (Stanojević 2003, p. 45). Therefore, profiling is another name for metonymy understood in the way it is presented in this source, and profiling is by no means metonymical semantic dispersion.

⁵ N. Ageeva (1990) recognises two types of verbal metonymy: *simple lexico-semantic metonymy* (which may be causal, colligative, indicative-symbolic, causal-target or synecdochal) and *complex lexico-semantic metonymy* (which may be causative, conversive or indirect). In case of simple metonymy, the verb's semantic and syntactic valences remain unchanged, whereas complex metonymy involves such changes.

⁶ For more detail on the prototypical manifestation situation of adjectives see Dragičević (2011, p. 172–178). This research shows that without the comprehension of the prototypical situation in which a human characteristic manifests itself, we cannot understand the semantics of adjectives used to name this characteristic.

Adjectival metonymy?

Aleksandr Birikh (1995) presents a detailed thematic overview of what is known as *adjectival metonymy* in the Russian language; all the metonymical formulas he mentions apply to the Serbian language as well. Let us mention a few examples: the colour of an object → the location of the object (*зелёный скат холмов* ‘the green hill slope’, *белый континент* ‘the white continent’); the colour of clothes → a person wearing clothes of that colour (*белая женщина* ‘the white lady’; *голубые, розовые, белые дамы и девицы* ‘blue, pink, white ladies and girls’); the colour of an object → the time period related to this object (*белая олимпиада* ‘the White Olympics’); the feature of a body part → the feature of a person (*морщинистое лицо* ‘a wrinkled face’ – *морщинистый старик* ‘a wrinkled old man’, *выбритое лицо* ‘a shaved face’ – *выбритый человек* ‘a shaved man’, *нахмуренный лоб* ‘a frowning brow’ – *нахмуренный юноша* ‘a frowning boy’); the feature of an item of clothing → a feature of a person wearing that item of clothing (*обтерпанная шинель* ‘a worn out coat’ – *обтерпанный студент* ‘a worn out student’); temperature → the location where or time period when this temperature occurs (*теплый край* ‘warm regions’; *жаркая весна* ‘a hot spring’); the feature of an animal’s fur → the feature of the animal (*кудрявая собака* ‘a curly dog’); the feature of a part → the feature of the whole (*мягкие сиденья вагона* ‘soft railway carriage seats’ – *мягкий вагон* ‘the soft railway carriage’); an intellectual trait → the body part showing this trait (*безумные глаза* ‘insane eyes’, *безмозглая улыбка* ‘a stupid smile’); the creator → the creator’s work of art (*бездарный поэт* ‘talentless author’ – *бездарные стихи* ‘talentless verses’, *гениальный писатель* ‘an ingenious writer’ – *гениальная книга* ‘an ingenious book’); a person with a certain physical trait → the body part or activity which shows this trait (*грациозная девушка* ‘a graceful girl’ – *грациозное движение* ‘graceful walk’, *немолодая женщина* ‘an old woman’ – *немолодое лицо* ‘an old face’).

In my view, the adjectives in these phrases are related to the nouns in various ways, but none of these cases can be described as an example of a metonymical use of an adjective.⁷ Namely, I believe that the adjectives were used in their primary meanings in all these cases, as described by I. Grickat (“the same fundamental concept, dependent on the word that this fundamental concept is in contact with”). Let us consider some of the most common ways in which an adjective can relate to a noun.

A sad book is a book which causes sadness. This is one of the typical adjectival uses, which does not cause a change of the adjective’s meaning.

⁷ This was first noticed in the analysis of 400 Serbian adjectives denoting human traits (see Dragičević 2001, especially Chapter II.7).

Sad eyes are usually eyes which express sadness, eyes in which sadness can be seen. This is another typical adjectival use, which does not cause a change of the adjective's meaning.

In certain cases, the adjective may imply that the noun has (possibly) been metaphorised / personified, e.g. *a crazy dress*. The adjective stays within its semantic scope, but the noun *dress* changes its meaning.

Let us pay closer attention to A. Birikh's example *a graceful girl – graceful walk*. He believes that the adjective is used in its primary sense when it modifies the girl, whereas it is used metonymically when it describes her walk. How can one be certain of the direction of the semantic change here? Perhaps the girl is considered graceful because she moves gracefully; perhaps it is exactly as A. Birikh thinks. The doubtful direction of semantic change clearly proves that the meaning of the adjective is absolutely the same in both cases, and that trying to identify one of the two uses as metonymical would be rather far-fetched. If semantic change occurs, its direction is unambiguous.

Conclusion

One of the ways in which cognitive linguistics has proven useful is the fact that it has enabled us to view linguistic units from a perspective that is wider than those offered by the prior linguistic research frameworks. It has allowed us to identify metaphor and metonymy in more extensive textual excerpts by applying the discursive method. In structuralist semantic analyses, only the immediate context of a lexeme is considered. A word used metaphorically or metonymically can literally be underlined in a certain context. Its meaning depends on the semantic determiner in the form of a lexeme which is adjacent to the word whose meaning is metaphorical or metonymical.

The cognitivist approach has enabled us to view the meanings of lexemes from a broader, more general perspective. Such a view testifies to the semantic domination of nouns in language, i.e. of concepts these nouns refer to at the textual level. Nouns are suitable for metaphorization and metonymization, while the purpose of adjectives and verbs is to indicate these semantic shifts. If the question was whether these lexemes are prone to these semantic transformations, my answer would be negative.

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STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł oparty jest na podstawowym założeniu, że metodologia językoznawstwa kognitywnego – w szczególności konceptualizacja i teoria metafory pojęciowej – umożliwiła prowadzenie szerszej zakrojonych i bardziej precyzyjnych analiz leksykalno-semantycznych. Niektóre zjawiska będące przedmiotem zainteresowania leksykologii, np. mechanizmy wyłaniania się nowych znaczeń leksemów (metafory i metonimie), mogą być rozpatrywane w szerszej perspektywie dzięki teorii metafory pojęciowej i metonimii. To ujęcie zainspirowało autorkę do sformułowania śmiałej tezy przedstawionej w artykule: jak się wydaje, nie można mówić o istnieniu metafor i metonimii, których nośnikami są czasowniki i przymiotniki. Wszystkie wystąpienia metafor lub metonimii są związane ze strukturami nominalnymi. Relacje leksykalne zachodzące w połączeniach składniowych

polegają na tym, że czasowniki i przymiotniki dopasowują się do rzeczowników w taki sposób, aby aktywować metaforyczne lub metonimiczne rozszerzenie znaczenia danego rzeczownika.

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