Preface

This book is the second edition of *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives,* which was first published in 2005. It appeared within the Elsevier series Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface. The book's popularity meant we needed to prepare a new edition. Since the Elsevier series had closed, we decided to publish the book with Mouton de Gruyter.

In the sixteen years between the first and second editions of this book, considerable changes in figurative language research made revision necessary. We updated the chapters in light of the latest research, and introduced new concepts. The theoretical part has been significantly revised and expanded, and now forms a greater proportion of the book. For example, Chapter 4, while retaining its title, has been significantly restructured and now includes completely new content. Major changes have also been made in chapters 1, 2, 6, 8 and 10.

In December 2017 Elisabeth Piirainen unexpectedly passed away, which made further revision extremely difficult. She collected invaluable empirical material, and I have largely tried to preserve it in this second edition.

What is this book about?

There are parts of the language system that cannot be analysed and described without addressing issues outside linguistics proper. The subject of our study belongs to this sphere. Any attempt to analyse figurative language by itself, without the inclusion of extralinguistic knowledge, is doomed to failure. The relevant differences between figurative units of language and their non-figurative near-synonyms can only be captured if we extend our data and methods and move into fields beyond linguistics in the narrower sense of the word. They cannot be exhaustively described or, more importantly, explained by means of purely linguistic methods. Instead, we have to address various types of extralinguistic knowledge, including knowledge that is culture-based.

The focus of our study is on conventional figurative units, i.e. not on novel metaphors, ad hoc metonymies, or various types of rhetorical figures, but on units such as idioms and lexicalised metaphors. The most important linguistic feature of these conventional figurative units is that they record and preserve relevant knowledge (as image traces) as part of their content plane, including, above all, reflections of the respective culture. The aim of this study is to develop a linguistic theory that is capable of taking this feature into account.

One of the most intriguing questions in the field of lexical analysis is the problem of the relationship between the figurative meaning of a lexical unit (idiom, proverb, one-word metaphor, etc.) and the mental image that forms its conceptual basis. For example, the word *web* denotes not only a spider's web but also a particular part of the Internet; the expression *a turn of the screw* stands

not only for a technical procedure, but also for intense pressure, constraint, or extortion.

A theory designed to analyse units of figurative language has to answer, at a minimum, the following questions: Are there any regular relationships between the literal, image-based reading fixed in the lexical structure of a given figurative unit and its lexicalised figurative meaning, i.e. its actual meaning? In other words, are such relations part of the more or less systematically organised structure of the lexicon? Can they be regarded as a relevant dimension of the structure of the lexicon, comparable to lexical relations such as synonymy and antonymy, or are they, rather, accidental and unable to be accounted for in terms of semantic regularities? Furthermore, if the relations between the literal and figurative meanings are systematic in nature, are they ruled by basic principles of human cognition, in which case they would have to be near-universals? Or do they vary from language to language to such an extent that it would not be reasonable to attempt to derive them from universal cognitive principles? What role does culture play in this domain? Is it possible to verify the assumption that some basic principles of human cognition are responsible for the creation of figurative units on the basis of literal units, and would such principles be modified by relevant cultural factors? Is the mental image underlying the actual meaning of a given conventional figurative expression only an "etymological" phenomenon, or is it (at least partly) a component of the content plane of the given expression? If it is the latter, what position in the semantic structure does the image component occupy? Does it have to be readily apparent in the meaning in the semantic representation of the given expression?

The general aim of our study is to develop a theoretical framework that makes it possible to analyse different types of conventional figurative expressions from different languages on a basis of consistent parameters and criteria, so that the potential findings will be fundamentally comparable. Such a framework will allow us to find at least tentative answers to some of the questions listed above. We refer to this theory as *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*. Accordingly, the proper subject of our study is *conventional figurative language*, i.e. a subsystem of the lexicon, as opposed to figurative ad hoc expressions produced in discourse.

We are convinced that an efficient discussion of this subject will only be possible if it is based on large-scale empirical work. Without a thorough analysis of hundreds of conventional figurative units from different languages, it would be futile even to try to discover relevant conceptual and semantic relationships in the domain of linguistic figurativeness.

We assume that figurative units differ from non-figurative units with respect to their semantic structure. A relevant element of the content plane of figurative

units is the so-called image component, a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure which triggers the corresponding mental image and the actual meaning of a figurative unit. One important consequence for a fine-grained linguistic analysis which follows from this assumption is that the traces of the literal meaning inherited by the figurative meaning have to be taken into account while describing the content plane of figurative units. This will help us not only to understand better the semantic and conceptual structuring of this part of the lexicon, but also to give an accurate lexicographic description of figurative units.

The conceptual nature of the image component can be roughly described as follows: mental images associated with figurative expressions are basically individual phenomena, but there are also intersubjective aspects to these mental images. The image component assumes the function of a semantic bridge between "what is said" and "what is meant", i.e. between the lexical structure and the actual meaning.

In order to achieve our goal, it is crucial to uncover the types of knowledge that are involved in the creation of motivating links between the two conceptual levels of figurative units, i.e. between the underlying mental image and the actual meaning. Even at first glance, our empirical data from different languages suggest that many significant properties of figurative language can only be explained on the basis of specific conceptual structures that we generally refer to as *cultural knowledge*. Furthermore, we assume that many phenomena found in figurative language can only be properly described if we address cultural codes other than natural language (folk beliefs, customs, literature, the fine arts, etc.). An appropriate theoretical framework should provide explanations for cases like these.

In summary, we would like to discuss in this study an array of questions that arise in the domain of figurative language, from both a cross-linguistic and a cross-cultural perspective. Instead of suggesting a global theoretical idea serving as a foundation for the description of figurative phenomena, we attempt to find an appropriate theoretical framework for all the individual aspects of figurative language. In our opinion, no global and abstract theoretical approach can capture all the relevant facets of this phenomenon and the links it has with other conceptual, cultural, and linguistic domains. As a whole, our approach (labelled here the Conventional Figurative Language Theory) can be qualified as cognitive because it addresses different types of knowledge as an explanatory basis for linguistic phenomena. The general task of this theory is not to predict particular expressions, but to explain their meanings and functions in connection with other conceptual and semiotic phenomena.

This book is both practical and theoretical. It is based on a large amount of empirical data from various languages, and certain parts of it can be used as an

aid to the lexicographic description and contrastive analysis necessary for foreign language teaching. Theoretically, it offers a framework (including a metalanguage) within which units of figurative language can be effectively explored and explained.

Another crucial feature of conventional figurative language lies in the fact that a rigid application of the Saussurian distinction between synchrony and diachrony is of little value here. This is because many characteristics of the contextual behaviour of conventional figurative units can only be explained by means of their etymologies; that is, certain traces of original readings function as "etymological memories" and, as such, have an effect on synchronically observable linguistic behaviour.

This book presents a further development of these ideas and a synthesis of all our individual and joint work. It combines our quest for cognitive approaches to the phenomenon of idioms appropriate to better explain their special quality, our interest in language comparison and rich empirical data from different languages, and our interest in the semiotics of culture and the far-reaching cultural foundations of figurative language. Accordingly, the theory presented in this study is an attempt to develop a framework that makes it possible to integrate single observations and results and create a common explanatory basis for these individual phenomena.

The Conventional Figurative Language Theory is a set of principles which aims to answer questions such as

– What is the difference between *literal language* and *figurative language*?
– Are there any operational criteria for distinguishing between them?
– What are the specifics of *conventional figurative language* as compared to *non-conventional figurativeness*?
– Which kinds of lexical units belong to the field of *conventional figurativeness*?
– Are there any specific analytical instruments for investigating the crucial properties of conventional figurative units?

The intention of this second edition of our book is to discuss these questions and to provide clear and convincing answers.

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