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Subjective transformation in poeticized language and the formation of poeticness

Abstract: As one locus of extraordinary collocations, poeticized language features expressions that depart from the physical reality, involving the subjective transformation of objects in the mental space. Increasing subjectivity renders extraordinary collocations resistant to rational readings, resulting in two types of constructions: "innovative" collocations and "self-created" collocations. The meaning construction in the former is easier to achieve than in the latter; the former entails the "rational evaluation" and the latter the "speculative evaluation" processes in metalanguage. With its rule-breaking defiance caused by meaning obscurity compensated for by rich implied meaning and positive aesthetic feedback, the "self-created" collocations are regarded as poetic and re-accepted by the system. Therefore, the so-termed "poeticness" is derived from the positive feedback during the speculative evaluation process and constitutes the main substance of aesthetic interpretation.
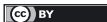
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1 Introduction

The idea of "poeticness" is often associated with rhetorical sentences which are rich in meaning and aesthetic value yet nonetheless construed as literally illogical. Linguistic expressions characterized by "poeticness" are referred to as "poeticized language" (Ren 2010), alternatively known as language with poeticness, poetic language, or artistic language.

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The definition of poeticized language remains a divisive issue in the literature where no clear distinction is drawn between the signifier and the signified of what is deemed a poeticized expression. A typical view holds that a linguistic sign is poeticized language exclusively when what the sign signifies is aesthetically pleasing. But if this is the case, set words and phrases such as "flowers," "beautiful," and "clear waters and green mountains" (青山绿水) may also be taken as instances of "poeticized language" if they are used to signify something aesthetically appealing or convey conceptual meaning construed as such. In this way, "poeticness" becomes an inherent component of the meaning of words and is thus irrelevant to creative linguistic activities. Similar to poeticized language, scholarly opinions are also divided as to what poeticness is and there is a tendency to embrace extensive loose definitions. For instance, some scholars attribute poeticness to musicality, equating rhythmic beauty with poeticness (Wu 2006). Some associate poeticness with imagery (Xi 2009), and others authorial style (Qiu 2021). These attempts to define "poeticness" fail to reach an agreement but have given rise to definitions that are circular, obscure, or unclarified.

Nonetheless, some of the proposals by literary scholars are insightful and of great value. For example, "At the center of poeticness is not pure meaning, but 'mood' and 'flavor' infused with poetic significance, which can, to some extent, reveal the character of poeticness" (Wang 2013, p. 51). To some degree, this view captures the characteristics of poeticness and gives insight into the difference between "poeticness" and "meaning." Liao (2011, p. 87) proposes that "the poeticization of the language of fiction is, in essence, the 'enchantment' of daily language through defamiliarization, the use of symbolism and metaphor, among other rhetorical devices." This point of view sheds light on the differences in coding between poeticized and common language. If we take a separate look at the two characters in the Chinese-language term "*shi-hua*" ("poeticized"), "*shi*" ("poetry") highlights the vague and obscure features of the language of poetry, pointing to the explanatory potential of the text, whereas "*hua*" (the Chinese pseudo-suffix imitating "-ize") is indicative of the dynamic process of transformation. In this article, we propose that poeticized language refers to the rhetorical expressions that have undergone formal transformation and semantic integration and have acquired uncertain irrational meaning of poetry, as opposed to common language.

In the following discussion, we draw from examples in Chinese literary works of fiction and poetry to illustrate the features of poeticized language in comparison with common language. Our analysis aims to give a detailed analysis of the form, meaning and pragmatic function of poeticized language in context. By analyzing and classifying the special features of encoding and decoding involved in the creation and processing of poeticized language, we intend to delimit the conceptual boundary of poeticized language and offer a renewed interpretation of "poeticness."

2 Transformation one: from irrealis to nonfactuality

A type of sentence in poetry is often associated with features of poeticness due to the syntactic or semantic deviations from regular combinations. The misplacement or cross-domain combination of its components results in nonfactual sentences that carry false literal meaning, which are seen as a type of "meaninglessness" (Ma 2004, p. 3). For example:

(1a)   <牛儿>悠闲地<反刍>着<岁月>。
        The cows were ruminating on the years leisurely.
                              (李钢《在远方》 *In the Distance*, Li Gang)

(2a)   你发出汉字<方块形>的<鼾声>|而他的鼾声定是水泡的圆形
        You produced square-shaped snores of Chinese characters/while
        his snores must be in the round shape of blisters.
                              (阿紫《夫妻》 *The Couple*, Ah Zi)

The nonfactual readings of these sentences result from the cognitive processing of the descriptions contextualized in the real world. If we recontextualize the sentences in the mental space by adding explicit markers (e.g., "as if", "in a dream") as shown below, we may dissolve the nonfactuality of the sentences, and the event, no longer false, makes its way into the irrealis category and gains a degree of logical significance.

(1b)   *觉得*牛儿*好像*悠闲地反刍着岁月。
        It feels as if the cows were ruminating on the years leisurely.

(2b)   *梦里*你发出汉字方块形的鼾声|而他的鼾声定是水泡的圆形。
        In your dream, you produced square-shaped snores of Chinese characters
        while his snores must be in the round shape of blisters.

Realis and irrealis are two opposite categories of semantics. The former depicts the state of doneness or definitiveness, or predication becomes an assertion about realis (Leech 1987, p. 219). On the contrary, the state of undoneness or indefinitiveness, negation, inference, hypothesis, doubt, among others, belongs to the irrealis category. In common language, realis and irrealis are indicated via tense and aspect markers as well as conditional conjunctions, and interpersonal elements such as referral markers and mental space markers are also used to suggest irrealis semantics such as doubt and imagination. In nonfactual sentences, the superficial meaninglessness conceals the meaning constructed in mental space, showcasing how a language reflects associative and imaginative relations.

Admittedly, we find meaning concealment also in common language. Take for example, the ambiguous expression 米勒的画像 ("Miller's portrait"), which can be interpreted either as "a portrait painted by Miller" or "a portrait of Miller painted by someone else." As such, the linguistic sign "Miller's portrait" does not have a single definite referent or signified. Tanaka-Ishii (2017) and Wang (2021) identify such ambiguous expressions as one type of blank-signs characterized by an "absent signified." While in the case of ɸ车在抽屉里 ("ɸ car in the drawer") or 有人壮烈ɸ了 ("Someone heroically ɸ"), the real events are expressed with some concealment "ɸ" for the economy of language. Likewise, in metaphorical expressions such as 喝西北风 ("feed on the winter's northwestern wind"), 心碎 ("heartbroken"), and 怒火中烧 ("blazing anger burning in heart"), the objects and markers of analogy are concealed. Though these expressions are not reflections of reality, readers are no longer aware of their semantic nonfactuality as these metaphors have been solidified into common usage. Compared with the aforementioned two types of structures, sentences (1a)–(3a) share the following three characteristics. First, they describe literally false events; second, they involve collocations that are original rather than solidified; and above all, they defy the construction of similar relations based on objective knowledge and common sense. As such, they qualify as a type of extraordinary collocations, distinguishing themselves from ordinary language by concealing mental space markers, achieving a transformation of meaning from irrealis to nonfactuality.

The change in the form of a linguistic expression often affects its meaning. For instance, 他死了 ("He died"), 他挂了 ("He kicked the bucket"), and 他逝世了 ("He passed away") share the same rational reading, yet differ in the reflective or emotional meaning they convey. Similarly, although the underlying meanings of the sentences in group (a) in the above examples are consistent with the surface meanings of the corresponding sentences in group (b), those in the former evoke aesthetic experience in readers who are invited to the realm of fantasy created by their nonfactuality and indeterminacy of meaning. Thus, it can be said that the "poeticization" of "poeticized language" originates from the first type of transformation, i.e., concealing mental markers to show readers semantic nonfactuality.

3 Transformation two: from subjectivity to individual subjectivity

As one of the characteristics of human language, subjectivity is reflective of the stance, attitude, or emotions conveyed beyond the semantics of the sentence. The subjectivity of a sentence is the result of the subjectivization of encoding, that is,

the adoption of a certain structure or pattern for the purpose of expressing subjectivity.

By adopting underspecified linguistic forms, poeticized expressions generate extraordinary collocations to describe "nonfactual" events and their contexts in the mental space (Fauconnier 2008, p. 15). Since mental space is associated with semantic "subjectivity," poeticized language can thus be seen as subjectivized discourse that foregrounds subjectivity.

A complete discourse act features a two-way interaction of "encoding → linguistic code ← decoding," both ways marked by subjectivity. The premise of the subjectivity of code is subjectivized encoding, which entails subjectivized cognition. Subjective transformation of language is not static, but a dynamic process of the interaction between the objective image (object O) and subjective cognition (sense S) in the physical world, where the relationship between the object and the self is actively examined by the subject. Language can be seen as a mental construction of and response to the objective world. In a broad sense, the generation of natural language also involves subjectivity, making it a generic feature of linguistic production. However, the two differ in the content and the purpose of expressed subjectivity.

Common language features the conventional combination of "sense S + object O," where grammatical structure and meaning are in harmony. See the examples below:

Adj. + N. constructions: 轻盈的白云/沉重的石头/宽宽的马路/窄窄的小巷 Light white clouds/Heavy stones/Wide roads/Narrow lanes

V. + complement constructions: 气得+浑身发抖/恨得+咬牙/切齿乐得+前仰后合 Be enraged + to tremble all over/Loath + with teeth grinding/Roll with joy + in the aisles.

Synonymous parallel sentences: 路遥知马力，日久见人心。/灯不拨不亮，人不点不明。 Distance tests a horse's stamina. Time reveals a man's heart./An oil lamp will not become bright if its wick is not flicked. Fig. A person will not understand if he is not guided.

Subjectivity and objectivity are expressed differently by lexical and grammatical means in the above examples. In the Adj. + N. constructions, subjectivity is found in the adjective that describes a subjectively perceived attribute and objectivity in the noun that refers to a specific object. In the V. + complement constructions, subjectivity is indicated by the abstract mental verb that captures a subjective physical or emotional state and objectivity is expressed by the complement that depicts an objectively observed consequential effect. In the parallel structures, subjectivity is conveyed in the latter half of the sentence where the abstract moral is extracted and objectivity is found in the first half where the known and definite

information is presented. The coexistence of the subjective and the objective meaning in these constructions is built on an innate logical connection between the components, which allows an integrated reading consistent with the reality. In his book *Language,* Bloomfield (1980, p. 166) said that only when the meaning of a form of speech is within the scope of our scientific knowledge can we accurately determine its meaning. Conventional language expresses precisely what is within the realm of science and can be accurately determined, i.e., the rational meaning that is no more, no less. Therefore, the subjectivity of the speaker or writer of common language is consistent with that of the group to which they belong. In other words, common language reflects the subjectivity of the group.

Poeticized language also reflects the fusion of sense "S" and object "O." Dissimilar to common language, however, the object "O" is not shared common sense or experience. The subjective sense "S" is uncertain, unclear, or irrational, featuring opacity. See the examples below:

(3)   很久以来|就有许多<葡萄>在晨光中幸运地<哭着> Since a long time ago,/ There have been many grapes that cry delightedly in the dawn.

(顾城《很久以来》 *Since A Long Time Ago,* Gu Cheng)

(4)   归巢的<鸟儿>｜尽管是倦了｜还<驮着><斜阳>回去｜双翅一翻｜<把斜阳><掉><在江上> The homewards birds, /Though tired and weary, /Still return with the setting sun on the back. /They flap their wings/And drop the setting sun onto the river.

(刘大白《秋江的晚上》 *Evening on Autumn River,* Liu Dabai)

(5)   <我>就躺在这草坪上｜听任自己<破碎>，然后<聚拢>｜听任自己的<身体><变成流水>。 I am lying here on the lawn, /Letting myself shatter, and then gather together, /Indulging my body in turning into flowing water.

(吴新宇《衣袂》 *Long Sleeves,* Wu Xinyu)

The events described in the collocations such as 葡萄哭 ("grapes cry"), 鸟儿驮着斜阳 ("birds with the setting sun on their back"), and 我破碎 ("I shatter") are not verifiable, which could be feelings, fantasies, or experiential scenes with individualized characteristics. In addition, compared with solidified collocations such as 黄河咆哮 ("the roaring Yellow River") and 彩云追月 ("colorful clouds chasing the moon"), the coding of these combinations are one-off events that are creative in form and not yet solidified. Thus, the poeticization of language reflects the one-off transformation of subjective content from commonality to individuality. The ultimate and paramount goal of meaning changes from the narration of facts to the expression of mood, emotion, and reflections that are highly personal and indefinable.

4 Transformation in coding: from innovative to self-created language

4.1 From objective similarity to sensory fusion

The projection of subjective cognition onto linguistic structures inevitably involves combinations that break or go beyond the restrictions of grammatical and semantic rules. Such rule-breaking practices are found in the dynamic process of language generation. They can be generated based on solidified constructions with limited innovation or can be completely self-created.

Emotions, experiences, and feelings are essentially individual and subjective, typically contextualized in structures of "I think …." Meanwhile, the abstract content leaves a gap in understanding, typically expressed by "it seems …." The juxtaposition of the two deprives a sentence of its realistic references, rendering it unlocated along the semantic continuum of incomprehensible sentences: To place it toward the right end of the continuum, the sentence is interpreted as natural language with the addition of mental markers; to place it toward the left end, the sentence is read as grammatically wrong as it is semantically meaningless or lacking contextual support. Placed in the middle, it can become comprehensible, ambiguous, or obscure based on different semantic relations and contexts. Below, we will use two sets of sentences to illustrate the effect of the degree of individual subjectivization on speech behavior. In these examples, we see as subjectivity increases, meaning resources underlying cognitive constructions decreases, which leads to weaker rational reading of the sentences and stronger associative reading that are undefined and changeable, as demonstrated in the figurative sentences below:

(6)   聪明人!在这漠漠的世上 | 只能提着<自信的><灯儿> | 进行在黑暗里 Oh smart people! Their journey in the dark/in this vast and lonely world/only carrying the lantern of confidence.

<div align="right">(冰心《春水》 Spring Water, Bing Xin)</div>

(7)   日脚已走到地平线下， <夜>的<羽翼>从遥远的天边覆盖下来。 The setting sun has moved below the horizon, and the feathered wings of the night fall to cover the land from the distant sky.
(程树榛《故乡心， 母亲情》 *Hometown Heart and Mother's Love*, Cheng Shuzhen)

(8)   我喜欢她<有机玻璃似的>声音、<的确良似的><举止>｜那被许多人的童
年滋养并发甜的情感｜那被红木槿讴歌着的青春 …… I like her organic
glass-like voice and dacron-like manners/the emotions that are nourished
and sweetened by many people's childhoods/and the youth that is eulogized
by the red rose of Sharon …

(路也《仲北小学》 *Zhongbei Primary School*, Lu Ye)

The sentences in Examples (6)–(8) all convey analogical meanings. Following the conversation principle, the interaction and communication between the reader and the author is enabled by mobilizing extra-sentential knowledge, experience, and common sense, which is prompted by the linguistic and paralinguistic cues. This process involves horizontal determinations, vertical correspondences, and analogical accesses, which jointly directing relevant cognitive mappings to construct analogical logical structures [S, T, fm]. That is, in an analogical mapping fm, there exists an analogous pairing or similarity relationship between the source item S and the target item T across the domain.

The meaning resources for analogy construction can be sorted into three categories:

1) Grammatical meaning and lexical meaning. For grammatical meaning, the "N + of N" structure in the examples above can represent analogous relationships (e.g., 奶油小生 "face of cream," 铁般的意志 "will of steel"). Other related grammatical elements include agent-object relationship, time, location, and instrument in a predication. Lexical meaning involves semanteme meaning, connotative meaning, conceptual meaning, as well as the lexical meaning of markers, such as 似的 ("–like") in Example (8).

2) Experience and common sense about the world. It refers to syntactically unrepresented extra-sentential information based on symbolic associations.

3) Language knowledge. It refers to the words, patterns, and metaphorical relationships that are solidified in a system.

Example (6) draws from resources in categories 1), 2), and 3): ∃ "N + of N structure"; ∃agent (人 "person"), predicate (提着/进行 "journey/carrying"), and argument (世上/黑暗里/灯儿 "in this world/in the dark/lantern") Λ∃common sense such as 灯照亮路 "a lantern illuminates the road ahead" and 自信使人坚定 "confidence makes a man strong" Λ∃ 行路 "journeying" used as a metaphor for 度过人生 "living one's life" in Chinese. Thus, a possible similarity pairing of 灯 "lantern" and 自信 "confidence" could be constructed due to the association between 照亮 "illumination" and 指明方向 "showing the way forward." The analogy points to the parallel structure and the missing component *x* where

S = Ms:A + V1 (carrying the lantern) +V2 (journeying in the dark)
T = Mt:A + V1$x_{\text{(? bringing)}}$ confidence +V2$x_{\text{(? living)}}$ in this vast and lonely world
Fm = [lantern: confidence] showing the way/direction in life

Example (7) adopts resources from the first two categories: 1) grammatical meaning, N. + (of) N and 2) common sense. The prototypical cognition of 羽翼 "feathered wings" evokes the top-down and from-far-to-near flight of birds/+darkness/+arcs/ +the dynamic action of covering when flapping wings, as well as the visual impression as night falls. The rich mapping between the flapping of the wings and the dynamic events in the nightfall creates sufficient similarities. Despite its adoption of grammatical meaning and analogical markers, Example (8) is a false analogy as it is ungrounded in common sense and linguistic knowledge. In other words, it seems difficult for analogical access to construct meaningful similarities in parallel with the structure, an indication of the differences in the strength of similarity across analogical sentences.

In terms of necessity, common sense and experience are the key resources of analogical cognition. Chen (2006, p. 75) once pointed out that "the metaphor and the object being metaphorized must be extremely dissimilar in their totality," while at the same time are "similar at a certain point." The similarities, however, are not necessarily identifiable on a literal level. Cross-domain analogical mapping and integration take place within the internal cognition of the writer and the reader. This means that one needs the resources to discern meaning, look for similarities in highly dissimilar cross-domain concepts, and determine the degree of semantic accuracy. The lack of analogical markers, the different representations of meta-phorical words, the categorized formats, and the sentence patterns with implied analogies all suggest that symbols must be supported by common sense and experience in order to acquire meaning. The subjectivity in Example (6) is the weakest, where S is dependent on the metaphor 度过人生 "living one's life" as 行路 "journeying," with the only speech act being the addition of new information within the semantic framework, and the determination of both Vx and the similarities is relatively easy. As a typical metaphorical statement, Example (7) expresses independent individual subjectivity, where the similarities are based on visual experience, and individual subjectivity can be recognized by and resonate with common subjectivity. Example (8) is the most subjective among the three, in which the rational meaning is further weakened by the lack of similarity, and its meaning tends to be obscure, bordering on idiosyncrasy. The examples also differ in terms of coding. Example (6) shows the linguistic "innovation" in a solidified metaphor. What Examples (7) and (8) have in common is the subjective "self-creation" of language during the introduction of the item S. However, the similarity stated in Example (7) is within the bounds of common sense and experience, whereas Example (8) remains open to interpretations with S strongly associated

with T, where the analogy is pushed to a more abstract level and the meaning is made more ambiguous. The three models of analogical sentences are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Three models of analogical sentences.

Individual subjectivity	Model of analogy	Similarity	Comprehensibility	Speech act
Weak	Derivative analogy	+	Easy	Innovation +
Medium	Typical analogy	+	Comprehensible	Self-created +
Strong	Formal analogy	−	Difficult	Self-created++

The subjective nature of analogy makes it partially or completely divorced from rational meaning and suitable for analysis of degree and scope. The connection of the distant S with the present T reflects the individual's subjective innovation or self-creation of speech. Low subjectivity results in low creation or self-creation, and strong accessibility of meaning, while high subjectivity leads to high self-creation and weak accessibility of meaning. The integrated meaning of subjectivized combinations contains associative meaning that cannot be determined correctly, which changes in contrast against rational meaning, i.e., a high content of rational meaning implies a low degree of subjectivity. Conversely, the higher the degree of subjectivity, the lower the content of rational meaning. Compared with typical analogies, formal analogies show more personal subjectivity with more ambiguous and obscure meaning.

Derivative and typical analogies are classified in rhetoric studies based on the presence or absence of markers, the looseness or tightness of the form, and the clarity or obscurity of the analogies and are respectively termed as explicit metaphors, implicit metaphors, and similes. The renowned Chinese rhetorician Chen Wangdao coined the term 移就 (*"yi-jiu"*) to appropriately capture the features of formal analogy, referring to "shifting the traits of impression A to impression B" (2006, p. 115). The Chinese scholar and writer Qian Zhongshu called it 通感 (*"tong-gan"*) (2002, p. 62). The addition of a rhetorical pattern affirms the division between physical and sensory analogies and recognizes the psychological integration of correlation and similarity on a more abstract level.

4.2 From similarity depiction to formal borrowing

Differences can also be found in subjectivity in personified expressions. With the intervention of association, the personification of inanimate objects in a sentence implies a cognitive deduction from the self to external objects.

The verb of the T-structure in a personification sentence is generally absent and written as "*x*" since the inanimate object is unable to initiate an action. Most personification sentences feature "hard" associations, forming a combination of "object$_s$ + person$_{VP}$," in which the noun referring to the object acts as the subject and the verb representing human action acts as the predicate, i.e., no similarity relationship is observed in the semantics, with only the physical or mental action of the person (person$_{VP}$) directly imposed on the object. In other words, the similarity between S and T is not a necessary condition for personification, as is shown in Example (9). However, when an object is dynamic, such as showing involuntary actions, e.g., 树倒了 ("the tree fell"), or when the object is linked to the agent, e.g., 推着货架移动 ("push the shelf to move"), S$_{object}$ and T$_{person}$ in personification sentences often show analogical similarity, as in Example (10).

(9)   汽车寂寞，大街寂寞。 Lonely cars, lonely streets.

(10)   钥匙插入锁孔，汽车愤怒地咆哮。 The key went into the lock and the car roared angrily.

We argue that similarity personification originates from association, while formal personification without similarity relationships comes from empathy. It is an indirect depiction of people using objects that bear traits transferred from people's emotions and thoughts.

In the language system, the metaphors based on "body-parts" encompass analogies in personification, such as 山腰 ("waist of a mountain"), 车头 ("head of a car"), and 针眼 ("eye of a needle"). In terms of sentence form, some formal personifications feature explicit objective similarity, whereas others imply similarity in a less conspicuous way, and in some extreme case, similarity is completely lost. For example:

(11)   窗子一关起来，立刻生满了霜，过一刻<玻璃片>就<流>着<眼泪>了，起初是一条一条的，后来就大哭，满眼是泪。 As soon as the window was closed, it was covered with frost, and in a moment the glass pane began to shed tears, at first one stream after another, then a full-scale cry, with the eyes full of tears.

(萧红《饿》 *Hungry*, Xiao Hong)

(12)   石桥无人河面无风｜木船无帆｜被一群木桩撑起的<乡村>｜<醉>在水中 The stone bridge had no visitors and the river got no wind/The wooden boat had no sail/Propped up by a group of wooden stakes, the village/got drunk in the water.

(郭密林《梦水乡》 *Water Village in the Dream*, Guo Milin)

(13)   a <北风>累了， 停下来｜b 背靠着一面阳光充足的墙<乞讨>｜c <碗里><
盛>满卑微的<目光> a. Tired, the north wind stopped/ b. the back against a
wall full of sunlight, begging/c. the bowl filled with humble gazes

(汤连生《街头》 *In the Street*, Tang Liansheng)

In Example (11), the personified event becomes that 玻璃片上霜融化 ("the glass
pane shed tears") with the effect of association as mentioned above, though the real
event is that "the frost on the glass melted," which involves a verb. Real events serves
as the background and basis of cognition, as they are associated with the personified
expressions on the ground of shared similarities. The rewritten formula is
["Object$_S$ + Object$_{VP}$" is similar to "person$_S$+ person$_{VP}$", ∴Object$_S$ + Person$_{VP}$]. The
similarity weakens individual subjectivity, enhances the rationality of personifica-
tion, and increases the acceptability of the statement.

In Example (12), the part 乡村醉 ("the village got drunk") takes the form of the
"thing$_S$ + person$_{VP}$" structure. In retrieving common sense and experience for sim-
ilarity construction, a related real event is activated: 人醉 ("the human got drunk")
(Person$_s$ + Person$_{vp}$). Nonetheless, in the T event (Object$_s$ + Object$_{vp}$), the *v* is the
unknown "*x*" because the "village" that takes the agentive position lacks the ability to
initiate an action. Hence, judged against the cooperative principle, the expression
can be decoded as formal personification. A possible rhetorical explanation might be:
Personification is realized by the lexical means 醉 ("drunk") to depict the peaceful
and serene beauty of the village. Further cognitive reasoning can explore the un-
derlying similarities and make optimal semantic assumptions based on 1) the lexical
meaning of 醉 ("drunk"); 2) the structural semantics, namely the dynamic results
associated with the semantic framework of 人醉 ("human getting drunk"); and 3) the
context. One possible understanding of the example is that "the village is reflected in
water, and the reflection is still": "People slumber after they are drunk."

It is hardly possible to construct similarity or association relations for
personification sentences when subjectivization is intensified. For example, in
Example (13), 北风乞讨 ("north wind begging") forms a formal personification of
"Object$_S$ + Person$_V$," which is sustained by a hard connection. Although the
personification of the 北风 ("north wind") is clear and echoes the formal personi-
fication of the latter part of the sentence 碗里盛目光 ("the bowl filled with humble
gazes"), it is difficult to piece together its semantic and associative meanings. If we
refer to the cooperative principle, multiple interpretations are possible: 1) We can
think of it as an ambiguous structure, e.g. 北风 ("north wind") is the name of a person
and thus the word refers to an individual; 2) We can try to build some correlation
between 北风 ("north wind") and people. For example, we may consider 北风

("north wind") and people as sharing the quality of being humble. However, it remains unclear why the north wind is humble, and 北风累了 → 停下来 ("the north wind was tired → it stopped") and (人) 背靠着墙+乞讨 ("(people) with the back against a wall + begging") are two independent semantic units with no inevitable event relationship; thus, it is difficult for meaning-making based on similarity, correlation, and mutual reference and invalidates proper interpretation due to insufficient language ability. 3) The extreme case of individual subjectivity where the decoder fails to comprehend the language. Example (13) is representative of such a type of personification sentences that are built neither on empathy nor association but on imagination, and that their semantics is infinitely close to meaningless sentences with a very high degree of subjectiveness. Personification sentences can be sorted into three models based on the strength of subjectivity (see Table 2):

Table 2: Three models of personification sentences.

Individual subjectivity	Model of personification	Cognitive thinking	Similarity	Degree of comprehensibility	Speech act
Weak	Similarity depiction	Association	+	Easy	Innovation
Medium	Transfer of personality	Empathy	−	Comprehensible	Self-created +
Strong	Formal borrowing	Imagination	−	Difficult	Self-created++

The first model, personification sentences of similarity depiction, is sustained by association and features a personified imitation made possible by the commonality in the form and the appearance of the object and the person between which the association is made. The second model, personification sentences of personality transfer, is motivated by empathy. Rather than giving a direct description of abstract content such as the sense of love, emotions, and feelings, these sentences transfer the psychological activities to be concretized in object forms. The third model, personification sentences built from formal borrowing, is based on imagination. It differs from the other two models in that these sentences borrow the mere form of personification for imaginary pictures generated in the author's mental space that s/he intends to describe.

In summary, poeticized language has various manifestations, with some more constructible than others. Despite their shared rhetorical patterns, the encoding of the structures of constructible subjectivity points to innovative language use, whereas the less constructible subjectivity, in the cases of false analogy and formal borrowing, is reflective of self-created language.

5 Interpretation path

5.1 From rational evaluation to speculative evaluation

The decoding of the meaning and function of a sentence consists of construal at the beginning and interpretation at the end. Construal is silent and introspective and aims at identifying and constructing meaning. Interpretation, in comparison, is the externalization of what is construed and is built on a discourse system for explaining language per se, also known as "metalanguage," which seeks theoretical and conceptual tools (e.g., theories of grammar, conversational principles, and figures of speech) for explanation. Based on the difference in the content of meaning, the act of interpretation can be specified into "rational evaluation" and "speculative evaluation." The former is responsible for stating rational or logical meaning, including the literal and the constructed meaning that is accessible. The latter is responsible for the extra-linguistic content of the meaning, where the reader attempts to subjectively represent the subjectivity of the writer. It focuses on the speculation of meaning beyond words, such as pragmatic meaning and conversational meaning, or the judgment of value or artistry. The decoding process is visualized in Figure 1 below:
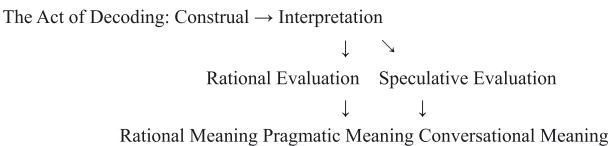
The Act of Decoding: Construal → Interpretation

$\downarrow$ ↘

Rational Evaluation   Speculative Evaluation

$\downarrow$ $\downarrow$

Rational Meaning Pragmatic Meaning Conversational Meaning

Figure 1: The decoding process of personification sentences.

Several points are to be noted in the interpretation with metalanguage. 1) Metalinguistic competence. It is one influencing factor of one's ability to conduct rational as well as speculative evaluation. 2) Metalanguage tools. In explaining the expression 演员是个动词 ("Actor is a verb"), Shen Jiaxuan, a well-known Chinese linguist, believes that it is rhetorical sentence yet fails to figure out its rhetorical pattern (Shen 2010), which can be taken as a case showcasing the insufficiency of metalanguage tools. 3) Textual context. The text suggests a communicative context with interpretive pressure, under which the reader or listener actively utilizes metalinguistic tools for the construal of subjectivity. As the carrier of meaning, the text per se in turn influences meaning and serves as a background for decoding, prompting decoders to expand meaning from the semantic level to the psychological, from concrete things and objects to the common abstract sensibility, and from the

reality to the metaphysical realm of the mind and spirit. 4) Effect of expression. Combined with semantic meaning, it refers to the interpersonal function generated simultaneously when uttering a sentence, i.e., the positive feedback that communication elicits at the decoding end.

The difficulty of interpretation is not always caused by the abstraction of the content. For example, Bian Zhilin's poem 断章 (*Fragment*) expresses the philosophy of "relativity." However, it is not difficult to understand for "relativity" is a universal subjective perception that is rational and definite. Only when the subjectivity departs gradually from the common sense along with an increased degree of individualization will the meaning move toward the opposite of rationality, producing undefined and changeable components that cannot be determined correctly, and the difficulty of interpretation rises accordingly.

"Xu Zhimo, a poet of the Crescent School, was reported to have said that poetry is the product of inspirational impulses, the natural outpouring of emotions … The essence of poetry is the ineffable expression of inner emotions, a spiritual phenomenon that cannot be interpreted and studied by systematic theories and sciences" (Li and Sun 2017, pp. 132–133). Poeticized language often depicts personal emotions, inspirations, spiritual, mental perceptions, and feelings. It is a collection of irrationals, unstable and unclear elements of meaning, such as [+personal subjectivity/+association and fantasy/+distant semanteme]. The lack of tools or the difficulty in inferring the rational meaning prompts the decoding process to the speculative evaluation of content beyond actual words. Take for example Xu Zhimo's poem 黄鹂 (*The Yellow Oriole*) as an example.

(14)　　　……看，一只黄鹂，有人说｜翘着尾尖，它不作声，<艳异><照亮>了<浓密> ---- 像是春光，火焰，像是热情。……但它一展翅，冲破浓密，化一朵云｜它飞了，不见了，没了 —— 像是春光，火焰，像是热情。
　　　… Look, a yellow oriole, someone says. /Tail cocked; it remains silent. Flamboyance illuminates' density – like spring, like flame, and like passion … But it spreads its wings, breaks through the density, and metamorphoses into a cloud. /It takes flight, and it is gong – like spring, like flame, and like passion.

Although the poem takes 黄鹂 ("yellow oriole") as its topic, it does not depict it in the way that we may find, say, in a biological article. A formal analogy is drawn between 黄鹂 ("the yellow oriole") and 春光/火焰/热情 ("spring/flame/passion"), signaled by the similarity marker 像 ("like"). However, there is no obvious similarity between the tenor and the vehicle, sabotaging the interaction between the reader and the poet writer. The fusion of the abstract object (spring/flame/passion) with the entity (the yellow oriole) in the mental space remains arbitrary; that is, "the yellow oriole" can be changed into any kind of bird or a certain animal. While the verse 艳异照亮了浓密 ("density is illuminated by flamboyance"),

extraordinary both in terms of grammar and semantics, can be taken as a formal metaphor that follows from the previous sentence. That is to say, 异艳 ("flamboyance") could be the characteristic of 春光、火焰和热情 ("spring, flame and passion"), and the pairing of the predicate 照亮 ("illuminates") and the object 浓密 ("density") implies a new analogy, i.e., 异艳具有发光物体的特征+照亮了+黑暗特征的 "浓密" ("flamboyance with the characteristics of a luminous object + illuminates + density with the feature of darkness"). The meaning of such a combination is nonetheless unclear, with a high degree of subjectivity.

Under the cooperative principle, the decoding process finds alternative approaches for poetry interpretation, such as seeking extra-textual to speculate on its psychological implications. The following excerpt illuminates the background of the poem.

> 伴随着世事变迁、家庭变故等众多原因， 诗人原有的那种空灵潇洒、活泼好动、隽美飘逸转而变得消积颓废， 甚至感染了悲观主义。 而《黄鹂》恰恰是这种转换的表现。 （《徐志摩， 再别康桥》万卷出版公司， 2014.07） "Through many vicissitudes of the world, the family and so on, the optimism, vitality and elegance of the poet started to give way to frustration and even pessimism. Poem The Yellow Oriole is exactly the manifestation of this shift." (*Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again, Xu Zhimo,* Volumes Publishing Company, Jul. 2014)

Some scholars resort to the poet's remarks and quotes. For example, the poet once made a comment on his work that, "I am very tired, but the continued work and the scenery of Beijing have revived my long-dormant heart" (Li and Sun 2017, p. 136). This statement was cited and commented on by some critics; one explanation goes as such:

> 诗人的性灵在无意间摇活了， 在终不可解脱的困窘中飘逝了。 这是诗人在《黄鹂》中表现的带有共性的情怀。 （《新诗鉴赏词典》上海辞书出版社， 1991 年11 月）
> The poet's spirit was inadvertently "shaken" to life but drifted away in inextricable dilemma. This is the sentiment with commonality that the poet expressed in *The Yellow Oriole*. (*A Dictionary of New Poetry Appreciation*, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, Nov. 1991)

The wording 悲观主义 ("pessimism"), 灵性的摇活和飘逝 ("the spirit being shaken to life and drifting away"), or other "*Xing Ling* theories" or symbolic techniques are the decoder's judgments of performative utterances that follow the pattern of "I think + statement." In the absence of a proper grasp of rational meaning, metalinguistic interpretation often shifts from rational to speculative evaluation, forcing a subjective formulation onto both sides by adopting the meta-linguistic discursive form, ranging from the subjectivity of the author, e.g., 表现了作者的 …… ("shows the author's …") to the subjectivity of the interpreter, e.g., 使读者产生了 …… ("makes the reader produce …").

5.2 From meaning to poeticness

In *Semantics*, Geoffrey Leech discussed the meaning to be expressed and the meaning that is understood. He argued that the in a broad sense, meaning concerns the "communicative effect" of information transmission (Leech 1987, p. 31). For example, the speaker points to the baby crawling to the edge of the bed and shouts 孩子！孩子！ ("Child! Child!"). In this case, the word 孩子 ("child") does not refer to the connotative meaning of a "child" but expresses the pragmatic meaning of suggesting danger or calling for help. Performative utterance, as behavioral linguists call it, examines the intention of the utterance as well as the perlocutionary effect as important issues. The language of cross talks, for example, contains copious amounts of performative utterance, and the speaker's intention is to make the audience laugh. Likewise, poeticized language also expresses the writer's intention and focuses on perlocutionary effect. Ma (2008, p. 1) pointed out the existence of the "compensation principle" in the language system, arguing that "compensation is a synchronic dynamic mechanism of language, which refers to the submission of language to certain anomaly to counteract the negative aspects through the positive effects achieved by breaking the rules of expression and to enhance the acceptability of utterances." The principle of compensation can be used to illustrate the rules for the creation of artistic language, i.e., a balance needs to be achieved between the intention of expression and the effect of expression. For extraordinary collocations, the "intention" is to express personal subjectivity, whereas for the "expression effect," there is internal differentiation due to differences in subjectivization.

All the extraordinary collocations have achieved the initial "novelty" in the effect of expression and completed basic compensation. The rhetorical effect of "→visual image," such as being "concrete, imaginative, and vivid" occurs mostly in innovative rhetorical sentences in which rational meaning can be constructed. At the decoding end, the individual subjectivity of the sentence is evaluated "rational evaluation." For self-created collocations with further-enhanced personal subjectivity and difficulty in rational meaning construction, the decoding end turns to "speculative evaluation" of meaning beyond words due to the difficulty in realizing the semantic interaction. The effect of the expression is described using words such as implication and aesthetic feeling (the beauty of an imagery, the beauty of an artistic conception and timelessness) in metalanguage. Under the compensation principle, the compensation equation for extraordinary collocations can be formulated as: "intention (personal subjectivity) + mode of transformation = extraordinary collocation + expression effect." Based on the basic compensation mode, the utterances generate two compensation models, i.e., primary compensation and advanced compensation, as detailed in Table 3:

Table 3: Two compensation models.

Equation		Coding transformation	Semantic construction	Code description	Expression effect
Models					
Basic compensation	Primary compensation	Innovation	+	Rational evaluation	+ Concrete + Imaginative + Vivid
	Advanced compensation	Self-created	−	Speculative evaluation	+ Implication (meaning) + Aesthetic feeling (pragmatic meaning)

Noticeably, "implication" refers to the obscure meaning on the reverse side of the rational meaning, and the series of concepts related to "beauty" correspond to interpersonal reading feedback. *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2022, p. 1139) defines "poeticness" as "an aesthetic enjoyment as expressed in a poem." This explanation specifies that its connotation corresponds to the combination of implication and aesthetic feeling, with the generalization function of interpersonal feedback hypernyms, and the important expressive effect achieved by self-created extraordinary collocations. At this point, the status of "poeticized language" in extraordinary collocations, the connotation and extension of this concept, and its relationship with "poeticness" also surface clearly: Compared with ordinary language, poeticized language constitutes a subcategory of extraordinary collocations, with its particularities manifested in aspects of semantics, linguistic code, discourse act, and pragmatic function (expressive effect). In semantics, it highlights personal subjectivity and lack of clarity in rational meaning; in linguistic code, it consists of extraordinary collocations; both the encoding and decoding processes involve the act of subjectivization; and pragmatically, the expression effect of "poeticness" is achieved. With the combined effect of the four peculiarities, "poeticized language" completes the dynamic adjustment within the language compensation mechanism, exerting the "poetic" effect of advanced compensation. The poetic feedback produced by poeticized utterances under the principle of cooperation compensates for the negative impact of meaning obscurity on linguistic rules and, therefore, is accepted by the language system. In many cases, "blank" means "poeticness"; the moment semantic meaning fails is the moment when the poetic meaning takes over and thrives.

"Poeticness" is an ineffable meaning, which corresponds to extremely subjective personal emotions, inspirations, and feelings; indefinable, which is difficult to articulate; and yet truly palpable. Since the content of the mind is greater than that of

the language, artistic language creates its own indeterminable "non-semantic 'poeticness'." Parallel to rational or logical scientific thinking, poetic aesthetics offers an alternative way of experiencing the world.

Poeticness also conveys/expresses personal and subjective meaning. Conjectural in nature, it arises from the speculative evaluation at the decoding end and is the active reconstruction of the meaning gap under the principle of cooperation following the failure of semantic construction. "Speculative evaluation" is often found in self-created poeticized language, focusing on discourse acts and pragmatic meanings beyond semantics, such as the extra-linguistic message, artistic device and style, plus expression effect of the poetic language. Its specific manifestation is "poeticness" in the functional category, and the beauty conveyed through dynamism, romance, implication, artistic conception, as well as assertions of artistic values in the category of "poetic meaning." It becomes a matter of opinion in that it is the subjective interpretation of the subjective. Ultimately, the authority of the "speculative evaluation" is highly correlated with the metalinguistic ability and authority of the discourse user.

6 Conclusion

For the expression and communication of emotions, moods, feelings, attitudes, and philosophical thoughts, poeticized language turns to extraordinary collocations, which stimulate the mental agency of the decoder with semantic irrealis. It not only conveys the basic meaning and suggests the personal reading but also acquires positive interpersonal meanings with the help of metalinguistic interpretation. Subjective transformation is stimulated by the constraints of subjective meaning components and syntax. During the encoding process, new elements must be integrated into the original content and new content into the old form to express a unique personal feeling. Such encoding acts, whether performed unconsciously or involuntarily, lead to semantic irrealis. While innovations mainly originate from the speaker and are determined by internal causes, self-creation arises from the object of utterance and is caused by external factors. The boundary between innovative sentences and self-created ones is not clear-cut. More often than not, the two forces hover at the border of the category of meaning, forming an adaptive yet innovative unity.

At the encoding end, subjectivization leads to innovation or self-creation of linguistic forms. At the decoding end, it leads to semantic construction and interpretation or speculative evaluation of the effect of the expression. Thus, "poeticness" emerges in the process of metalinguistic speculative evaluation. As a superordinate concept of irrational meaning, it also offers major content for positive aesthetic feedback and speculative evaluation. Driven by association, imagination, and

inspiration, poeticized language breaks through the limitations of natural language and thrives in the spiritual realm of intuition, sensibility, and aesthetics.

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