

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij & Elisabeth Piirainen: *Figurative Language Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives (Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 350)*, 2nd edition, revised and updated. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. 504 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-061691-0.

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen are well known specialists in the field of phraseology and lexicography, with a huge scientific production over the four last decades, especially in the field of linguo-cultural studies. This work is a revised and expanded version of their renowned book *Figurative Language*, published 17 years ago by Elsevier, which updates its contents according with the progression of phraseological studies during the elapsed period. In the meantime, Elisabeth Piirainen had passed away while she was collecting new materials, to enhance the empirical basis of their cognitive *Theory of Conventional Figurative Language*, which have been also incorporated into this updated version (especially in chapters 1, 2, 6, 8, 10).

For too long, idiomatic multi-word expressions have been considered as unpredictable and unconnected facts, more or less “exceptional”, and, especially arbitrary. The emergence of cognitive semantics opened new perspectives for the study of metaphorical motivation from a psychological perspective (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980), although in Russia and Poland this path had already been initiated, from an anthropological perspective, by the neo-Humboldtian schools of Veronika Telja (1996) and Jerzy Bartmiński (2009). The approach adopted by Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen is more along these lines (*linguo-culturology*), although integrating some principles of Yuri Lotman's *semiotics of culture* (1992) from a multilingual comparative angle. Their proposal is a *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*, accounting for the mechanisms that govern conventionalized metaphors through their semantic motivation, which would be essentially culture specific. A complete explanation of polysemy must find systemic relationships between the literal level of lexical structures, be they words or idioms, and their lexicalized figurative meanings, highlighting some kind of organization, which cannot be accidental, since figurative meanings are much more numerous than the literal ones. On the other hand, such relations should be investigated from an empirical, multi-cultural and multilingual points of view, outperforming ethnocentric preconceptions on ‘universality’.

The central theoretical assumptions of this study are:

1. a specific conceptual structure underlies the meaning of a figurative unit,
2. this conceptual structure contains traces of the image underlying the lexicalized meaning,

3. these traces provide motivational links, which constitute a relevant part of the content of a given figurative unit, based on mental imagery, called ‘image component’.

The **image component** is defined as *a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure which triggers the corresponding mental image and the actual meaning of figurative units* (p. 13). Besides its actual referential meaning, a figurative unit also includes traces of the literal sense, which underlie the global meaning, a second conceptual level remaining unconsciously present as a kind of “semantic bridge” between what is meant and what is said (pp. 13–14).

As far as idioms are concerned, the authors make a distinction between other subordinated concepts within the image component:

- *inner form* (referring to the literal components),
- *mental image* (referring to the semantic interpretation),
- *etymological memory* (traces of the figurative past of a given lexical unit that are still accessible in the present, although not coinciding with its *synchronic motivation*) (pp. 18–20). Even opaque structures, such as *kick the bucket*, could be motivated by folk etymology or by real etymological knowledge (p. 21),
- **additional naming**, referring to the fact that there are normally other (simpler) expressions denoting approximately the same entity, and that the idiomatic one has a kind of ‘semantic surplus value’ (cf. *to spill the beans* vs. *reveal a secret*).

The combination of both criteria (*image requirement* and *additional naming*) is necessary for distinguishing figurative from non-figurative units. An expression without *image* but with an *additional naming* function is non-figurative (all synonyms are additional namings); and an expression with an *image* but no *additional denotative* function would be non-figurative as well (p. 22). Although the *image component* is only a potential element that can be consciously activated only in certain very specific contexts, the user’s etymological knowledge is supposed to be active at the unconscious level.

On this basis, the authors define the criteria governing the internal classification of the different types of figurative phrasemes (chapter 2) and the degree of *equivalence* between idioms from different languages, a question that has consequences not only for translation practice, but also for the compilation and structure of bilingual dictionaries (chapter 3).

The crucial issue of *motivation* (chapter 4) is the central axis of this theoretical construction. Since the “mental images” of metaphors are considered as a part of their content plane, their motivation is an autonomous factor which brings to the speakers strategies for understanding them (p. 105). The opposition between diachronic (etymological) motivation and synchronic motivation is not

so important from the viewpoint of Cognitive Linguistics, since metaphors are *based on comparable conceptual operations* (p. 106).

One of the examples illustrating this apparent paradox is the German idiom *unter die Haube kommen* [**under the bonnet come*] ‘to marry (a woman)’. The bonnet was a headdress of the traditional costume of the married woman, the image refers to a gesture of the bride on her wedding day, when she had to put on the bonnet for the first time. This ritual habit is completely lost, and the *etymological memory* of the idiom has not retained traces of its historical origin, as shown by its restrictions of use (current discourse refers also to males), weakening the gender-specific usage restrictions of the original expression, although they have not completely disappeared either from its cultural semiotics (pp. 108–109). On the other hand, there are *synchronically opaque* idioms, such as eng. *to go bananas* (‘to get crazy’), allowing no metaphoric inference, being *ill-formed* (...), with no sense in itself. (p. 112).

Several kinds of motivation are described: *concept-based, symbol-based, frame-based, textual-based, index-based*... A special type is called *coercion*: when the *image component* of an idiom is based on a meaning shift involving just one of its lexical elements: *the contextual conditions of the idiom’s literal reading force the realization of one meaning of the constituent, while the figurative meaning of the whole idiom requires the realization of the second (less frequent) meaning of this constituent*. The semantic bridge between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of an idiom such as *for donkey’s years* (‘for a very long time’, a pun alluding to the length of a donkey’s ears, as well as to the wrong pronunciation of *years* as *ears*), points to the shape of a long object, whereas the word *years* (instead of *ears*) forces the shift from space to time. The motivation link is provided by the semantic links between these two readings (p. 133).

The contrastive perspective reappears in the section dedicated to false friends and paronyms, whereas a more detailed justification is presented in the theoretical section dedicated to the relations between conceptual metaphors and *culturally grounded* metaphors, within the frame of Cognitive linguistics (chapters 5, 6 and 8). As a more concrete illustration of their methodology, the authors bring out some detailed multi-lingual case studies about the expression of FEAR, HOUSE, NUMBERS and ANIMALS (chapters 7, 9, 12, 13).

The empirical contrastive approach of these chapters involves huge quantities of figurative multi-word fixed expressions, drawn from 11 languages from different cultural areas:

- a) five Germanic languages, closely related genetically, linguistically, historically, and culturally: English, German, Dutch, Swedish and *Westmünsterländisch*, a Low German dialect, spoken in a border area between Germany and the Netherlands,

- b) four other Indo-European languages from different branches (Eastern Slavic, Baltic, Romance and Hellenic): Russian, Lithuanian, French and Greek,
- c) one Uralic language, though geographically and historically close to the Indo-European cultures: Finnish,
- d) one isolated language representing a culture which has almost no historical relation with European cultures because of its self-imposed isolation for centuries: Japanese.

The most specific contribution of the Conventional Figurative Language Theory (developed in chapters 10, 11 and 14) deals with the role of cultural constructs in the mechanisms of metaphor, through motivational links, not as predictive tools, but for *post factum* explanations. The authors state that *the most salient features of figurative semantics cannot be captured by metalinguistic tools aimed exclusively at looking for regular characteristics, because a high number of figurative meanings are under the influence of certain culture-specific phenomena*, which may be historically determined, and need a specific semantic and pragmatic analysis, including comparisons between similar expressions from different languages.

For almost two decades, the methodology elaborated by Dobrovolskij and Piirainen has inspired a multitude of papers, books, and doctoral theses, revolutionizing the whole field of phraseological studies and even multilingual lexicography. Therefore, this book can be considered nowadays as a “classic” of the discipline, and this new edition is particularly welcome for scholars and students interested in idiomaticity, which is still a tough nut to crack for theoretical and/or empirical linguistic studies.

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