

Prikazi knjiga  
Book reviews  
Rezensionen

**Marija Omazić**

Faculty of Philosophy  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University  
Osijek

**Dobrovol'skij, Dmitrij O., Elisabeth Piirainen: *Figurative Language: Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Perspective*. Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface, Volume 13. Amsterdam [etc.]: Elsevier, 2005. pp 419. € 91.95.**

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen's 2005 book titled *Figurative Language: Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Perspective* examines figurativeness across languages and cultures, exploring the regularity of relationships between the literal, image-based reading fixed in the lexical structure of a given figurative unit and its lexicalized figurative meaning. As a result of this exploration the authors offer a common basis for exploration of figurative language, a CONVENTIONAL FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE THEORY that draws not only on linguistics, but also on cognitive heuristics and cultural studies.

The authors first address general issues and set their working hypotheses, i.e. that the *image component* is a specific conceptual structure, often historically or culturally grounded, mediating between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of figurative units, and that it is a relevant element of their content plane. The image component is viewed as responsible for restrictions on the use, semantic and pragmatic features of figurative units, as well as some of their modifications. The objects of their study are figurative conventional expressions i.e. idioms, proverbs, figurative collocations or one-word metaphors. Figurative units are said to possess a second conceptual level at which they are associated with the sense denoted by their literal form, i.e. the literal interpretation evokes mental images (i.e. *the image component*) responsible for the proper interpretation of a figurative expression. The authors further examine and challenge dif-

ferent notions of figurativeness (those by Lakoff and Johnson 1980 and Dirven 2002), arguing that only those conventional expressions with a clearly identifiable image component can be considered figurative, and excluding from their analysis the non-figurative metaphors and metonymies.

As the authors wish to place their work within the framework of phraseology, a brief outline of the main developments and trends in the field of phraseology is provided in Chapter 2, with the focus on much discussed but still unresolved problems of terminology and types of units that are the object of phraseological research. Dobrovolskij and Piirainen argue for the use of the term *phraseme* as an umbrella term to cover all different sets of phraseological units, dismissing the terms prevalent in current use: *phraseological unit* as sounding unnatural in English, and *fixed expression* as focused on fixedness which is not exhibited by all phrasemes equally. Their proposal sounds well-founded as it is based on an analogy: the object of phonology is a phoneme, the object of morphology a morpheme, and in the same vein the object of phraseology may be called a *phraseme*. Although it sounds natural to speakers of Slavic languages, (Cro. *frazem*), it is still a question whether it will ever become a widely accepted term in the English-speaking community, as the umbrella term in their tradition has always been *idiom*. Even if it does get accepted, it will still do little to actually resolve problems of phraseology more acute than terminology, namely subtypes of phrasemes and the criteria for the inclusion of items in particular classes of phrasemes, or provide an answer to how to deal with borderline cases. The book is phraseologically unorthodox in many other respects. The first thing that clashes with the generally accepted traditional phraseological theory is the fact that the authors discussed the inclusion of one-word metaphors among objects of their study. Traditional phraseology defines its basic unit as a combination of two or more words, multi-word expressions, polilexemic units, etc., always stressing that the meaning of the expression is usually, but not always, not equal to the sum of meanings of its components. Few authors include single word expressions in their inventory of phraseological units. Among such 'single-word' cases we could count for example the word *snake* metaphorically used to denote a dishonest, dangerous person with a hidden agenda, or the word *angel* for a kind, gentle, and helpful person. A possible way of dealing with such cases, as well as adjectives like *snaky* or *angelic* would be to use them canonically with the verb *to be* or similar copulas, with which they co-occur in most cases. When presented in such a way, expressions of this kind can be counted as multi-word expressions. Single figurative verbs (like *to cloud*), mostly conversions from nouns which themselves have figurative readings, are more difficult to account for within phraseology. This is perhaps the reason why the authors chose to talk about 'figurative language' only rather than about phrasemes in general, thus narrowing down their scope to only those phraseological units that have figura-

tive readings, and are not semantically transparent. This, however, also means that the resulting theory proposed by the authors provides only for a segment of phraseological data, however large, but leaves out units that are not inherently figurative, such as *if at first you don't succeed, try, try again*, or *practice makes perfect*. What is more, modified phrasemes, figurative yet not conventionalized, also fall outside the scope of their analysis. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the authors consider the theory of phraseology to be a 'module' of their conventional figurative language theory, which can hardly be the case as the field of phraseology is more far-reaching than that of figurative language. In this chapter the authors also discuss one of the still unresolved issues in phraseology: the inventory of units that fall under the category of phraseological. Does phraseological necessarily mean 'figurative' or it can simply mean 'phrasal'? In other words, is it the frequency of occurrence or the figurative meaning that is decisive for classifying an expression as phraseological? Phraseologists with a flair for corpus linguistics favour statistical mutual co-occurrence data as being indicative of phraseological status, whereas the ones who favour the more traditional approach opt for figurativeness as a decisive factor, and dismiss expressions that have only literal reading. Not surprisingly, the main focus in this book is on figurative idioms, similes, restricted collocations, and proverbs.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies of figurative language, providing tools and methods useful for arriving at reliable conclusions about figurative and phraseological language universals. Chapter 4 offers a detailed discussion of motivation, suggesting a typology of motivation for different conventional figurative language units, further developed in chapter 8, dealing with metalinguistic tools for describing motivation phenomena, particularly metaphorical iconic motivation, in which they presented a metalinguistic apparatus labeled *cognitive modeling of figurative semantics*, the description of the plane of content of a figurative unit including a corresponding fragment of knowledge structure (a frame), as well as the sum of cognitive operations underlying its motivation.

In Chapter 5 the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural approach to conventional figurative units (CFUs) is practically applied to examine the issues and origins of false pairing of CFUs in different languages, as well as issues of homonymy and paronymy, arguing for the necessity of a more in-depth semantic and conceptual analysis conducted either at the basic level or at the superordinate level of categorisation, i.e. via different rich images, via different conceptual metaphors, or at a single constituent-based level.

In Chapter 6 the authors set out to challenge the postulates of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (CTM) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). It is ar-

gued that despite claims that many conceptual metaphors are universal (like ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER as the cognitive basis for *someone's gall/bill flows over*), many are indeed based on historical knowledge that, although perhaps not valid any longer, still contributes to the interpretation, i.e. the overproduction of *yellow bile* is traditionally associated with anger, and the interpretation of the expression relies on this association rather than on the container metaphor, in other words, the postulated conceptual links are largely arbitrary and call for alternative explanations. Conventional metaphors, especially idioms, contribute much less to the structuring of unstructured situations than novel metaphors do, but they convey different kinds of knowledge that they have accumulated in the course of their functioning in the language. The authors do embrace the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor as a valid and useful tool for analyzing conventional figurative language, but argue that the knowledge of underlying conceptual metaphors is insufficient or not linguistically relevant in all particular cases. Case studies of the Japanese expressions denoting anger are used to illustrate a clearly culture-based difference in conceptualizing anger: in Japanese there are three body zones: ANGER has the source in the HARA, the region of the belly; it may rise to MUNE, the chest region; or, at its most intense, it may reach ATAMA, the head. Further case studies include the cognitive analysis of idioms of fear, arguing for the place of structural semantics and mental imagery in this process, as well as the investigation of the concept of HOUSE in English, German, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, Japanese, and a Low German dialect, efficiently illustrating that different cultural issues are at work not only across languages, but also across dialects. The main points of criticism of the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor are that the CTM cannot account, or can only partly account, for the wealth and breadth of phraseological data across languages, as well as that it does not incorporate enough relevant cultural inputs that help shape the conceptual systems in different languages and for different cultures. The criticism does stand, it is just that Lakoff and Johnson did not launch their theory with intent to provide for the bulk of phraseological material, so the full overlap could not have even been expected, nor they and their followers denied the role of culture in shaping the conceptual systems of different languages. It has been more than adequately provided for in Kövecses' book *Metaphor and Culture* (2005). Kövecses, whose work prior to *Metaphor and Culture* they challenge, has provided answers to many of their points of criticism, so it is unfortunate that the two books appeared largely at the same time, making it impossible for the authors to take each other into account, as they seem to have worked simultaneously, but independently. Kövecses investigates universality and variation in metaphors, and provides answers to how and why metaphors vary within and across cultures, examining the degrees of cultural coherence in the interplay among conceptual metaphors. He proposes a theory of metaphor variation, to an extent complementary to that of Dobrovolskij and Piirainen, but

he also outlines different dimensions of intra-cultural variation of metaphors (2005: 88-111), as well as cases of individual variations.

In Chapter 10 the authors classify conventional figurative units depending on the type of cultural knowledge they incorporate into: CFUs based on the knowledge of social interaction, material culture, intertextual phenomena, fictive conceptual domains, and cultural symbols, resulting in a typology that can be used as tool for the comparison of the cultural foundation of different languages. In subsequent chapters the author provide a detailed account of different types of culture-based CFUs: cultural models (social conventions, gestures and gender-specifics), phenomena of material culture (artifacts), intertextual phenomena (quotations and allusions), fictive conceptual domains, cultural symbols, cultural connotations (proper names, idioethnic realia), as well as instances of blending of cultural phenomena in figurative units.

Chapter 11 provides a discussion of cultural symbolism and 'symbol' from perspectives of different disciplines. The notion of 'symbol' is analyzed from the perspectives of linguistics and semiotics, and as analogical thinking, as an arbitrary sign, as connotative meaning, as a culture-semiotic phenomenon. The authors have developed the notion of *cultural symbol in language* and devised criteria for distinguishing symbols from metaphors.

Case studies of expressions containing animal names and numbers that follow in two subsequent chapters demonstrate the correspondence between conventional figurative language and culture, based on the main cultural codes of religion (both Western and Eastern), myths and national epics, fairy tales, fables, popular beliefs, customs, and ethnic traditions, as well as philosophy, literature, arts, and music, across languages as diverse as English, Japanese, French, Dutch, and Lithuanian. The authors examine the cultural element incorporated in the use of numbers four, eight, nine, and eleven, as well as the following animals: snake, wolf, bear, and owl in conventional figurative expressions.

The concluding chapter represents the novelty and essence of this work, as in it the authors outline the elements, basic postulates, tools and principles of the Conventional Figurative Language Theory. In order to analyze the empirical data from different languages in the proposed theoretical framework, the authors have also developed various methods of analysis, including selection criteria, classifications and typologies of relevant phenomena, and metalanguages for describing the phenomena. Their theory is a combination of cognitive, traditional philological and cultural approaches, and allows only those generalizations that

have the status of *ex post factum* explanations or plausible tendencies, which makes the analysis possible, yet does not provide productive rules.

What the authors, however, did not manage to do is the same thing they find faulty with the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, i.e. their theory only accounts for a section of phraseological material: only its figurative part. The theory provides for the conventional figurative language, but fails to account for instances of 'unconventional,' novel figurative language. Corpus studies have shown (Omazić, in print), surprisingly high percentages of modified compared to conventional uses of phraseological units in large corpora, making the proposed theory of conventional figurative language cover only segments of what is happening in the phraseological material 'at large.' Such a theory is not unattainable; rather it has already been developed within the realm of cognitive linguistics. Surprisingly enough, while claiming to have taken a 'cognitive approach' to figurative language, the authors seem to have neglected the more recent and more promising cognitive theory of conceptual integration or blending (Fauconnier and Turner 1998).<sup>1</sup> The Blending Theory appears to be more successful in trying to account for the mental organization and production of phraseological material, proper and modified, and should, therefore, allow an even higher degree of generalization. Moreover, as it operates with a number of input spaces, the input space of culture can successfully be attached to the conceptual integration network, thus easily dismissing the critique of the absence of culture from the model. Both the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor and the Conventional Figurative Language theory thus leave out, or cannot account for, a portion of phraseological material and should not be considered ideal frameworks, but rather as partly complementary theories for dealing with phraseology in general.

This, however, can in no case *cloud* the fact that the Conventional Figurative Language Theory developed by Dobrovolskij and Piirainen will definitely have wide reception in the field of phraseology, as the lack of widely accepted and more or less universal theoretical underpinnings has been one of its weakest points. Their work is a systematic and well-developed account of cultural elements encoded in figurative language, and the ways in which they can be treated, and as such is a welcome and valuable blend of theories, providing phraseologists with a solid theoretical framework to start from and build on. The book of this scope and focus will surely become and remain one of the central reference works and an excellent starting point for all future phraseological research, especially culture-based and contrastive studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Although papers on blending theory do not include any case studies of modified idioms, blending is shown to be at work in idiom modifications in Omazić (forthcoming and in this volume).

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