Facing metaphors as the most complex iconic signs: Toward a synthetic analysis of figuration in Greek street art

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Abstract

Cognitive linguistic and semiotic accounts of metaphors have often discussed the complex phenomenon of *metaphor* in various ways, often addressing factors such as universality and conventionality, context-sensitivity, cross-cultural variation and creativity, deliberateness and "multimodality". However, in most cases, such factors are investigated in isolation (cf. Gibbs 2017). Therefore, we propose a cognitive semiotic approach that can help us to seek convergences instead of divergences among such long-standing debated issues by using a coherent and consistent terminology, informed by cognitive semiotics.

Cognitive linguistic approaches to metaphor propose an understanding of metaphor as an instrument of thought, rejecting the traditional notion of metaphor as a figurative device (e.g. Grady 1997; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) emphasizes that metaphors are more or less fixed (and static) conceptual mappings based on bodily and cultural experiences. What we argue instead is that such cognitive correspondences are not metaphors *per se,* but rather diagrams, serving as motivations for the use of contextually situated and culturally embedded metaphors.

Taking the overall theme of the conference, *iconicity,* we highlight that similarity-based analogies (diagrams) between *source* and *target* are the dominant motivating factors for metaphor creation and interpretation. At the same time, the semiotic grounds of indexicality and symbolicity (based on sociohistorical awareness, background knowledge and context) are closely interacting with iconicity. This conforms with the view that metaphors are the most complex iconic signs (Peirce 1974 [1931]) especially when understood as creative, emergent, and dynamic processes, which are socio-culturally derived and contextually influenced (Kövecses 2015, Müller 2008, Sonesson 2015).

Our presentation argues for a synthetic cognitive semiotic investigation of metaphors in Greek street art by bringing together complementary perspectives from semiotics and cognitive linguistics.

References

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