

Toward an identification procedure for verbal and pictorial metonymy

Di Wu¹, Jordan Zlatev²

¹Sun Yat-sen University, wudi78@mail2.sysu.edu.cn ²Lund University

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Aiming for higher degrees of empirical validity metaphor scholars have developed several procedures for identifying metaphors in verbal text, such as MIP (Pragglejaz Group 2007) and MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010), as well as in pictures, such as VisMip (Šorm and Steen 2018), and in verbo-pictorial representations such as street art (Stampoulidis et al. 2019). While metonymy has gained much interest in the past decades, there has been much less effort to provide corresponding identification procedures for it, especially when moving beyond the semiotic system of language. Perez-Sobrino (2017) provides an extensive empirical analysis of “multimodal” metaphors and metonymies in advertising, but the criteria for identifying metonymies, and their combinations with metaphors (“metaphonimies”) are not always clear. In fact, an identification procedure for metonymy is badly needed, as the “conceptual turn” in the field had led what is in fact an inflation of the concept, as pointed out by Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2022). For example, we need to set limits so as not to overextend metonymy to phenomena like mental associations (e.g., Christmas and childhood memories), enactive perception (e.g., tears and sadness), or inferences (e.g., a bachelor and his typical way of life).

Based on the classical analysis of metaphor and metonymy as (verbal or non-verbal) sign-use that is based, respectively, on the similarity and contiguity of meanings (Jakobson 1971) and Langacker’s analogous claim that in metonymy “the entity that is normally designated by a metonymic expression serves as a reference point affording mental access to the desired target, i.e. the entity actually being referred to” (Langacker 1987: 385-386) we propose the following theoretical definition of the concept, in accordance with the Motivation & Sedimentation Model (Zlatev et al. 2021): An (a) act of sign use, (b) involving one or more semiotic systems (e.g., language, gesture, depiction), where (c) the intended meaning (d) is understood through another, more directly represented meaning, (e) which it does not resemble as it does in metaphor, but is rather related to it in a part-whole or contiguity-based relationship. We show how this definition can be operationalized into an identification procedure, which we apply to a sample of verbo-pictorial messages, identifying monosemiotic and polysemiotic (i.e., involving more than one semiotic system) metaphors and metonymies.

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