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On developing Multimodal Metaphor Theory into Multimodal Trope Theory

It was Aristotle who wrote in his *Poetics* that mastery of metaphor is a sign of genius. It took, however, many centuries before metaphor studies became truly popular, particularly thanks to Ortony (1979) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980). These books emphasized that metaphor is primarily a matter of thought, and only derivatively a matter of language. Scholars such as Whittock (1990), Carroll (1994), and Forceville (1996) took this idea seriously by embarking on metaphor research involving other modes than language – mainly focusing on the visual mode. Work in this area is still in full swing, not least because robust analysis of metaphor (as of anything else in the study of discourse) needs to be cognizant of (1) the combination of modes deployed; (2) the genre to which the metaphorical discourse belongs; and (3) the medium in which it occurs (see Forceville 2020). There are still many mode combinations, many genres, and many media to be studied ...

But work needs to expand into a different direction as well. If “metaphor” is first and foremost a matter of thought, then surely other tropes are, too (Peña-Cervel & Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez 2022). Accepting this idea, it makes sense to systematically start investigating which other tropes may be usefully claimed to have visual and multimodal manifestations. Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the awareness that “metonymy” – though less spectacular than metaphor – is an equally crucial trope gained ground around 2000. This insight in turn spawned research on visual and multimodal metonymy (notably by Pérez-Sobrino 2017; but see also Kashanizadeh & Forceville 2020, Guan & Forceville 2020, and Zhang & Forceville 2020).

What about other tropes? Is it possible/useful to talk about visual and multimodal antithesis? Irony? Hyperbole? Symbolism ...? If so, can they co-occur? These are daunting questions, requiring hard thinking and hard work by scholars combining expertise in rhetoric and visual & multimodal analysis (Tseronis & Forceville 2017, see also Forceville 2019). In my talk I cannot but scratch the surface of these questions. Drawing mainly on my own earlier (co-authored) work, I will say something about the role of mode, genre, and medium in analysing metaphor, metonymy, and antithesis, and sketch some of the other problems that need to be addressed by scholars intent upon extending classic verbal rhetoric into a “Conceptual/Multimodal Trope Theory.”

Keywords: visual tropes; multimodal tropes; visual communication & cognition

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