



3-section: Linguodidactics: digital technologies and modern trends in foreign language teaching.

**THE MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:
COGNITIVE, COMMUNICATIVE, AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract

This article examines the diverse cognitive, communicative, and social functions of figurative language, drawing on linguistic, psycholinguistic, and pedagogical research. It highlights the efficiency, conceptual power, cultural grounding, and developmental patterns of figurative expressions, emphasizing their importance for language learning, cross-linguistic awareness, and effective instruction in figurative competence.

Key words: figurative language, conceptual metaphor, psycholinguistics, language pedagogy, cross-linguistic variation, figurative competence.

**OBRAZLI TILNING KO‘P FUNKSIYALILIGI: KOGNITIV,
KOMMUNIKATIV VA PEDAGOGIK YONDASHUVLAR**

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada obrazli tilning kognitiv, kommunikativ va ijtimoiy funksiyalari lingvistik, psixolingvistik va pedagogik tadqiqotlar asosida tahlil qilinadi. Unda obrazli



ifodalar samaradorligi, konseptual kuchi, madaniy asoslanganligi va rivojlanish xususiyatlari ta'kidlanadi, shuningdek, til o'rganish, tillararo ong va obrazli kompetensiyani samarali o'qitishdagi ahamiyati yoritiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: obrazli til, konseptual metafora, psixolingvistika, til pedagogikasi, tillararo variatsiya, obrazli kompetensiya.

МНОГОФУНКЦИОНАЛЬНОСТЬ ОБРАЗНОГО ЯЗЫКА: КОГНИТИВНЫЕ, КОММУНИКАТИВНЫЕ И ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются разнообразные когнитивные, коммуникативные и социальные функции образного языка на основе лингвистических, психолингвистических и педагогических исследований. Подчеркиваются его эффективность, концептуальная мощь, культурная обусловленность и закономерности развития, а также значение для изучения языков, межъязыкового осознания и эффективного обучения образной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: образный язык, концептуальная метафора, психолингвистика, языковая педагогика, межъязыковая вариативность, образная компетентность.

Figurative language constitutes a central component of human communication, extending far beyond the realm of literary ornamentation. Its cognitive, communicative, and cultural significance has been increasingly recognized within contemporary linguistics and cognitive science. Scholars have demonstrated that figurative forms shape not only how we express ideas but also how we conceptualize abstract domains and navigate social interaction. As such, understanding figurative language requires examining its cognitive foundations, communicative functions, and developmental trajectories in first and second language contexts. The following article explores these dimensions in depth, highlighting the multifaceted roles of figurativity in discourse, cognition, and pedagogy.



Figurative language serves a variety of purposes in discourse, far beyond mere decoration or stylistic flourish. Contemporary linguistic and cognitive theory has identified many functional aspects:

- As conceptual metaphor theory demonstrates, figurative language provides the cognitive resources needed to understand abstract, complex, or novel phenomena through systematic mappings from more concrete, familiar, or better-understood domains. This cognitive function is particularly valuable for conceptualizing intangible domains like emotions, time, ideas, and social relationships, which lack direct sensory equivalents.
- Figurative language generally enhances communicative economy, conveying meaning or experiential richness more efficiently than protracted literal description. “*She has a heart of stone*” exemplifies a metaphor that can convey complex emotional traits associated with being emotionally insensitive more efficiently than an extended literal description could [3;89].
- Emotional states, attitudes, and judgments are more powerfully conveyed through figurative language than through neutral literal language. The heightened emotional load of figurative language, particularly in poetry, enhances its memorability and impact through the activation of both cognitive and affective processing systems.
- In literary contexts, figurative language serves aesthetic functions, creating beauty, pleasure, or distinctive experiences through novel juxtapositions, perspectives, and formal design. This aesthetic component corresponds to the Russian Formalists’ notion of “defamiliarization”—rendering the familiar strange to regenerate perception and heighten consciousness.
- Rhetoric has long valued the power of figurative language, starting with Aristotle. Metaphors, for instance, can structure issues in ways that support particular understandings or judgments, as research on political metaphors shows: framing crime as a “*virus*” rather than a “*beast*” influences policy attitudes [5;7]. The persuasive effect operates both through affective involvement and through cognitive structuring provided by metaphorical schemata.



- Figurative language facilitates social bonding, in-group identification, and interpersonal rapport. Shared understanding of culture-specific idioms, metaphors, and allusions marks cultural insider status, and innovative figurative language in conversation can establish rapport and collaborative meaning-making.
- Figurative language encourages the softening of potentially face-threatening matters, particularly those concerning death, body functions, or social taboos. Euphemistic figurative language allows individuals to discuss delicate issues without violating social propriety [1;74-85].
- In educational contexts, figurative language, particularly analogy and metaphor, serves key explanatory functions, making unorthodox ideas accessible by comparison with familiar domains. Scientific terminology extensively employs metaphor (e.g., *computer “memory,” “genetic code,” electromagnetic “waves”*) so that conceptual understanding of abstractions can be achieved.
- Alternative figurative expression choices (formal or colloquial, conventional or innovative, culturally specific or general) contribute to speaker identity construction and projection, encompassing regional, social, occupational, and personal facets.

Appreciating this functional diversity is crucial in language pedagogy, since it highlights that the ability to handle figurative language entails not just recognizing and interpreting figurative expressions but also knowing and using them for a variety of communicative, cognitive, and social purposes.

Poetry, through its intense and elaborate use of figurative language in all these functional directions, offers the best material for constructing all-around figurative language ability.

Psycholinguistic examination of figurative language has been extensively researched using methodologies like reaction time measures, eye-tracking, neuroimaging, and discourse analysis. Earlier hypotheses posited that figurative processing involved initial attempts at literal interpretation, followed by rejection and figurative reinterpretation when



the literal meaning was contextually inappropriate—a serial model suggesting that figurative language would be slower and more difficult to process than literal language.

Cumulative evidence, however, refutes this model, showing that conventionally-supported figurative language is processed as quickly and efficiently as literal language, suggesting parallel rather than serial processing. Psycholinguistic experiments by Gibbs on idiom comprehension confirm that conventional figurative language is often stored and retrieved as global units rather than compositionally calculated from constituent lexical information [2;124]. This finding supports the conclusion that the literal-figurative distinction may be gradient, not categorical, as expressions vary along dimensions of conventionality, transparency (the degree to which a figurative meaning can be gleaned from constituent elements), and contextual predictability. For classroom pedagogy, this research implies that conventional figurative expressions should be explicitly taught and memorized as lexical chunks rather than expecting learners to infer meanings compositionally.

Cross-linguistic differences in figurative language patterns create obstacles and opportunities for second language learning. Certain conceptual metaphors appear relatively universal (e.g., *happiness is up*, *anger is heat*) and reflect embodied perception [4; 54]. Yet most figurative phrases are culturally specific, reflecting particular values, historical events, and environmental circumstances. Target language figurative understanding and production can be facilitated or impaired by learners' first-language figurative patterns depending on cross-linguistic similarity. Comparative examination of figurative language in different languages—an exercise especially suitable for multilingual classrooms—can increase metalinguistic consciousness and highlight both the universal and culturally specific aspects of conceptualization.

Second language learners acquire figurative language skills following developmental patterns that have attracted growing research interest. Typically, literal meaning is learned prior to figurative meaning, and transparent, conventional figurative language prior to opaque or highly original expressions. However, context-driven figurative language in actual conversation may be comprehended by learners earlier than decontextualized



instruction would suggest. Formulaic phrases and idioms, commonly employed by learners, may be learned as gestalt chunks before the underlying metaphorical structure is identified. Explicit instruction highlighting conceptual metaphors, cultural contexts, and pragmatic functions appears to accelerate figurative language learning, particularly for older learners who can leverage metalinguistic awareness.

Figurative language is an essential resource for cognition, communication, and social interaction, extending beyond stylistic embellishment. Developing figurative competence in language learners requires explicit instruction, cross-linguistic comparison, and engagement with authentic discourse. Fostering this proficiency enhances expressive abilities, intercultural understanding, and full participation in the target language.

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