

The Role of Metaphor in Literary Texts: Cognitive, Cultural and Aesthetic Dimensions

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Abstract. *This article explores the multifaceted role of metaphor within literary texts, emphasizing its function not only as a linguistic device for conveying information and aesthetic expression but also as a crucial source of cultural knowledge. The study examines the structural, cognitive, and interpretive aspects of metaphor. It highlights metaphor's capacity to articulate complex emotional states, construct poetic worldviews, and shape narrative progression through extended and recurring figurations. The discussion further addresses the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor comprehension, focusing on culturally embedded receptive schemas that facilitate the decoding of implicit meaning. The article underscores metaphor's irreplaceability by literal paraphrase, noting its unique ability to encapsulate aestheticized emotion and individual authorial vision.*

Key words: *metaphor, literary text, figurative language, cognitive schemas, poetic worldview, implicit meaning, extended metaphor, cultural knowledge, text interpretation, aesthetic emotion.*

In literary texts, language functions not only as a vehicle for conveying information and achieving aesthetic objectives but also as a significant source of cultural knowledge. Numerous scholars, including A.A. Potebnya, M.N. Kozhina, V.A. Pishchalnikova, and others, have emphasized that metaphorical expression constitutes a fundamental characteristic of literary discourse. They assert that the author's figurative metaphor plays a pivotal role in constructing the artistic world. According to G.D. Akhmetova, the linguistic space of such texts is inherently metaphorical in structure. This suggests that literary language is characterized by allegory, figurativeness, and imagery [Ахметова 2010: 7].

Metaphors constitute the foundational element of the figurative system in literary texts and serve as a principal means for constructing a poetic worldview. According to N.D. Arutyunova, the tendency of literary language toward metaphorical expression can be attributed to the poet's deliberate departure from conventional perceptions of reality [Арутюнова 1990: 17]. Rather than conceptualizing the world through broad categorical terms, the poet seeks to reveal the unique, individual essence of objects. In this context, metaphor operates as an implicit contrast between the ordinary, everyday vision of reality and an unconventional perspective that exposes the singular nature of phenomena.

The motivation for metaphorical transfer may lie in the established logical-syntactic patterns encoded in language, which structure classes of events, or in the spatial and conceptual proximity of material objects within the worldview, that is, in their object-logical relationships as shaped by the linguistic experience of speakers. In Aristotle's classical definition, metaphor or figurative expression is described as "the transfer of a name from one thing to another: from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy" [Аристотель 1957: 109].

What, then, is the role of metaphor in literary texts? Primarily, metaphor serves as a means of expressing phenomena that elude direct linguistic nomination—for example, a character's inner emotional or psychological states. Through metaphorical constructs, one can trace a sequence of experiences or transformations undergone by the protagonist. Such expressions often capture the reader's attention through their novelty, originality, and the unexpected reconfiguration of linguistic elements and semantic associations.

Given that metaphorical discourse is rooted in associative thinking and the cognitive capacity to conceptualize one domain in terms of another [Лакофф, Джонсон 1990], metaphor involves the fusion of two seemingly unrelated entities within a single linguistic unit, entities that, while incompatible in reality, share an underlying conceptual link. Thus, the perception and interpretation of metaphorical language become essential to accessing the author's worldview and understanding their individual conceptual framework.

Through metaphor, poets represent the same referent or phenomenon in markedly different ways, reflecting their unique perceptions, value judgments, and overall worldview. At times, however, different authors metaphorize the same object or concept in similar ways, revealing shared cognitive or cultural patterns.

Metaphor can also play a significant structural role in the composition of a literary text. In some cases, a metaphor may appear at the very beginning, immediately capturing the reader's attention and evoking an aesthetically charged emotional response. In other instances, metaphorical expressions serve to prepare the reader for the climactic point of the narrative or act as a stylistic device for framing that moment.

A recurring metaphor within a literary text may acquire symbolic meaning. When combined with rhetorical gradation, it can serve as a marker of narrative progression or of the protagonist's psychological transformation.

Can a metaphor be adequately replaced by a literal expression or a paraphrase using direct nominations? Scholars offer differing perspectives on this issue. M. Black argues that “the deficiencies of literal paraphrase lie not merely in its tedious verbosity, excessive explicitness, or stylistic shortcomings, but in its lack of the insight into the nature of things that metaphor uniquely provides” [Блэк 1990: 169].

It seems evident that any attempt to substitute a metaphor with a literal paraphrase inevitably diminishes the text in some way: it may become unnecessarily verbose, lose its stylistic appeal, or fail to convey the depth of meaning, such as the nuanced emotional or psychological states of a character.

A literary text, characterized by its dominant “aestheticized emotion,” shaped by the author's aesthetic ideal and articulated through a complex system of linguistic devices – foremost among them metaphor tends to exert a far more profound impact on the reader than texts governed by everyday or journalistic modalities [Бутакова 2003: 62].

In literary texts, a metaphor can be developed into an extended form. As V.I. Arnold explains, “an extended metaphor consists of several metaphorically used words that together create a unified image, that is, a series of interrelated and mutually reinforcing simple metaphors that enhance the motivation behind the image by repeatedly linking the same two conceptual domains and enabling their parallel operation” [Арнольд 1981: 83].

The study of metaphorical expression, figurative language, and implicit meaning inevitably raises questions about the processes of understanding and interpreting literary texts, particularly as they relate to the decoding of metaphors. As I.A. Sternin notes, when readers interpret explicitly presented information (including that contained in metaphorical judgments), they compare the linguistic signs perceived through their sensory experience with the mental representations stored in their cognitive thesaurus. The resulting synthesis forms the overall meaning of a given utterance and of the text as a whole [Стернин 2006].

The extraction of implicit meaning in a text requires the presence of specific mental (cognitive) frameworks within the linguistic consciousness of the recipient. I.A. Sternin refers to these as receptive schemas – culturally and socially determined models of understanding embedded in an individual's cognitive system, which are activated during the process of text perception (reception).

The interpretation of the hidden meaning in metaphorical expressions relies on the application of these receptive schemas, that is, the reader applies culturally specific cognitive patterns to the interpretation of particular utterances. As Sternin notes, “the comprehension of implicit meaning within a text occurs through the mental receptive schemas of the linguistic consciousness of a given society” [Стернин 2006].

Importantly, the interpreter must acquire a continuum of such schemas through processes of education and socialization, which enable them to recognize and decode culturally embedded figurative meanings.

Metaphor serves as a foundational element in the architecture of literary texts, enabling authors to transcend the limitations of direct linguistic nomination and convey the subtleties of human experience, particularly psychological and emotional states. Through its inherent figurativeness and capacity for extended development, metaphor constructs intricate poetic worldviews and functions as a dynamic structural device within narratives. The act of interpreting metaphor involves the engagement of culturally specific cognitive frameworks – receptive schemas, that mediate the reader's understanding of implicit meanings embedded in the text. Attempts to replace metaphor with literal paraphrase invariably diminish the aesthetic and conceptual richness of the literary work, underscoring metaphor's unique role in shaping both the text's emotional impact and its cultural resonance. Ultimately, metaphor not only enriches the artistic fabric of literary discourse but also provides essential access to the author's individual perception and the collective cultural consciousness.

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