

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

FACULTY OF ARTS

The issue of figurative language in pragmatics

Ph.D. thesis

ATTILA L. NEMESI

Szeged

2007

I.

Today, the linguistic status of figures of speech interests not only the scholars of rhetoric, stylistics, semantics, and the literary studies. Although it has been a known fact that the figurative use of language had not exclusively been a decoration of literary works or public speeches, it was the spread of pragmatic thinking, cognitive semantics, and experimental psycholinguistics that was necessary for the research to increase focus on everyday communication.

Different studies and different authors use the basic terms in diverse ways, so it is important to make it clear at the beginning that the dissertation follows the dominant convention of pragmatics as it interprets the term *figure of speech* (cf. *figurative* meaning) as a broader category than *trope*: the latter only refers to metaphor (including simile, personification, allegory, synesthesia) and metonymy (involving synecdoche, emphasis, antonomasia), while the former refers, beyond metaphor and metonymy, to irony, hyperbole, litotes, oxymora, and colloquial tautology as well. All in all, figures of speech refer to all kinds of general meaning-transposition patterns (*schēma* in Greek), not merely to those based on conceptual analogy (metaphor) or connection (metonymy).

The production and interpretation of figurative meanings as communicational phenomena raise or concern all those fundamental questions which are in the limelight of pragmatic interest since the 70s:

- (i) The separation and separability of layers of meaning, their criteria; the stratification and the relationship of literal and nonliteral meanings, including the dilemma of the boundary and division of labor between semantics and pragmatics. Speech act theory and Grice's model of cooperative communication represent the traditional way of pragmatic conceptualization taking literal (or conventional) meaning as the basis from which the implicit content of communication can be deduced or, in other words,

the real intention of the communicator can be inferred. In the past two and a half decades the number of those criticizing this idea has increased as several experiments in psycholinguistics resulted in the following: the mental processing of indirect speech acts, idioms, metaphors, and other forms of figurative language does not take more time than the understanding of literal usage. Moreover, the literal meaning of tropes and figures often is not activated, only the figurative meaning is recalled. No doubt, these findings question the psychological reality of the so-called (Searlean and Gricean) standard model (see, e.g., papers and books of Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr.).

- (ii) The mental representation of human understanding (modularity and its variants), the comprehension of figurative languages in case of aphasic patients, and the development of cognitively plausible alternatives of the standard model, e.g., Sperber and Wilson's (1986/1995) widely accepted and quite prosperous 'relevance theory' or Giora's 'graded salience' hypothesis. According to the latter, comprehension of linguistic production takes place in several phases and what directs the interpretation process is the most salient meaning of the lexical item. The comparison of these theories with one another and with the affirming or disaffirming empirical facts is extensively discussed in the second chapter of the dissertation.
- (iii) Why do we use figures of speech in every stage of interpersonal and social communication, and why do we prefer some types of figures in a given situation? Chapter 3 of the dissertation argues that the transmission of attitudes and impressions is an integral part of the figurative way of communication. According to the author, besides the exchange of information about the actual topic it is necessary to take the projections of the participants' *faces* (in the Goffmanian sense) into consideration, which combine with the message that strictly concerns the actual topic of verbal interaction.

II.

A dissertation concerning figures of speech, even if it is written in a pragmatic framework, should refer, at least in general, to the rhetoric tradition: to all that from Aristotle to the 20th century neorhetoric, furthermore, in stylistics had been explored and to those basics that are required to outline the pragmatic connections of the question. It is followed by the survey of the main points of the referential, descriptivist, generative linguistic, and cognitive semantic insights, the in-depth review of Searle's and Grice's theory, then a discussion of contextual and modular psycholinguistics and, finally, the post-Gricean cognitive pragmatic (relevance-theoretic) interpretations. The first and most important conclusion presenting itself is that neither semantics nor pragmatics is able in itself, excluding the other, to manage the problem of figurative language understanding as a whole, thus neither can endeavor to take such a privileged position. The problem, however, that needs to be discussed is the ideal division of labor between the two. The author's point of view will be shortly summarized as follows.

The process of understanding can be divided into two parts: (i) recognition (or releasing) and (ii) the identification of figurative meaning. To discover the principle(s) of releasing is in the first place the task of pragmatics with the exceptions of those few instances when there is an explicit linguistic marker (e.g., the conjunction *like* in similes, the excessive in Hungarian and the extreme case formulations in case of hyperboles). The starting point of the offered explanation is the norm of the conventional use of language, which is analogous with Bach's and Harnish's definition of presumption of literalness (1979). The presumption of literalness, however, is a too strong expectation due to its conceptual inaccuracy. From Searle's theory, through Grice's to Giora, we can observe an interesting terminological development of the two-stage pragmatic model of figurative language interpretation (literal meaning → conventional meaning → the most salient meaning). The author uses the terms *conventional meaning* and *the most salient*

meaning interchangeably, since the four parameters of the most salient meaning (frequency, familiarity, conventionality and prototypicality/stereotypicality) given by Giora can be reduced to one of them: to conventionality (which is frequent, familiar, and prototypical is at the same time conventional). According to this terminology, the fact that a meaning is coded in the mental lexicon does not guarantee that it is the lexical unit's conventional, namely its most salient meaning. The norm of the conventional use of language is the general tendency of communication and the mutual belief in the linguistic community C_L that whenever any member S utters any e in L to any other member H , if S could (under the circumstances) be speaking conventionally, then S is speaking conventionally.

Thus, the norm of the conventional use of language from the speaker's point of view is a fundamental bias, or, a natural tendency of expression in linguistic behavior (this is how the word *norm* should be interpreted), which is automatically followed by in the lack of special (e.g., emotional) motivation or perlocutionary intention, while from the point of view of the listener, the presumption of the described expressional tendency. The default case in usage is the form of expression that chimes in with the norm of the conventional use of language: this has the least production expense and risk of comprehension failure (it is not sure, of course, that in the same time it has the greatest cognitive effect). The nonconventional meaning generation is, in contrast, the marked case, which induces the listener to start the active inferential process.

A set of heuristics in reasoning helps the recognition of the divergence from the norm of the conventional use of language, including figurative language detection as well. This is the real status of Grice's "maxims," when we look at them from the aspect of understanding (cf. Levinson 2000). After changing Grice's formulations only as much as is required, we should concern the following heuristics (being subordinate to the norm of the conventional use of language): (1) Quantity heuristic: "Is the conventional meaning of the statement informative enough?"; (2) Quality heuristic: "Does conventional meaning of the

statement refer truly and accurately to real state of affairs, or to the speaker's intention?"; (3) Relation heuristic: "Is the conventional meaning of the statement relevant?"; (4) Manner heuristic: "Is not the statement obscure, ambiguous, or prolix in its conventional meaning?". The Quantity heuristic triggers the figure of tautology, the Quality heuristic triggers metaphor, metonymy, exaggeration, litotes, and irony, and the Manner heuristic triggers oxymoron (but it can collaborate secondarily in the recognition of metaphor, metonymy, irony, and litotes as well). Relation heuristic is indispensable when the figurative statement is true in its conventional meaning. It is pointed out that the above heuristics are not necessary and sufficient conditions; instead, they are cognitive aids to the understanding. The first, recognition phase is not relying only on these, since there are paralinguistic and nonverbal cues, such as the ironic tone of the speaker's voice, the corresponding punctuation mark (...) in written texts, the ostensive mimic, gesture, and there are genre-specific (e.g., in connection with poetry, the ironic-bantering colloquial conversation) and person-specific expectations (e.g., we know that the speaker likes to exaggerate, to use tropes). Though these can all play a part in discovering the implicit meaning, the four heuristics are the primary factors of triggering nonconventional meanings.

The conventional figures are left out of the previously sketched framework, since their meaning is tapped in the mental lexicon, so they do not have to be noticed and interpreted again and again. The author makes a distinction between the concept of *pragmatic figures* and *semantic figures*, to avoid confusion caused by the restricted use of the term *figure*. Every general and productive meaning-transforming pattern or scheme that is based on the exploitation (using the word in accordance to Grice) of the norm of the conventional language use is a pragmatic figure. Not only the meaning-transforming patterns but, metonymically, their concrete linguistic realizations can be said to be pragmatic figures as long as their meanings transformed by the scheme are not conventionalized (lexicalized). Every systematic relation between the polysemous lexical units' (own)

conventional meanings, which corresponds to the meaning-transforming scheme of a pragmatic figure, is a semantic figure. Moreover, semantic figure is every linguistic expression that had been—according to the metonymic association—a pragmatic figure, but its meaning transformed according to the given scheme of the pragmatic figure was conventionalized (lexicalized) in time.

Thus the pragmatic figures are meaning-transforming schemes and linguistic expressions produced by those. They will become, through conventionalization (lexicalization), semantic figures. Since conventionalism is not a static, absolute category but a continuum, it is not always easy to draw the borderline between pragmatic and semantic figures. Sometimes it is enough if the researcher relies on his/her own meaning-competence (in a similar way that descriptive linguists do not always test each of their judgments concerning grammaticality, but they appeal to their linguistic competence). However, there are instances when certitude can be gained only from “outside:” using psycholinguistic or corpus linguistic methods, relying on the opinion of native speakers.

But, as the operation of a signaling button is not equal with the process itself the start of which is indicated by it to the operator, the understanding of the pragmatic figures is also not only about the triggering phase. The second, more complex operation is the discovery of the intended meaning, that is, the selection of the proper meaning-transforming pattern and the adaptation of it to the expression that violates the norm of the conventional use of language. Selection is aided by the heuristic giving clues to norm-breaking, but it cannot solve it in every case (a heuristic can trigger several figures). In this case, all the potential schemes are checked and we give preference to the one that makes the expression meaningful for the most part.

In general we can say less about this second phase of the interpretation as if concentrating to one particular figure. It can be stated that the more exactly we can define a meaning-transforming scheme, without referring to pragmatic considerations, the more semantic process of the identification of the meaning in

demand will be. Concerning metaphor, the essence of the scheme is an analogy between the figurative expression’s conventional meaning (or, cognitively speaking, the concept coded by it) and the linguistic context. However, almost anything can be compared to anything in some aspect. This aspect is exactly what the receiver has to discover, to which his pragmatic abilities are needed as well. The complex scheme of the metaphor makes the transmission possible in one semantic field (or conceptual sphere). But how do we know the reason that, for example, British military surgeon and scientist Denis Burkitt received the nickname “fiberman” from his colleges and that it is a metaphor or a metonymy? Here also pragmatic inferences are needed. The case of irony would be easier if we had to think always to the opposite of the conventional meaning. However, the dissertation reveals different irony data and definition as well. Hyperbole and litotes contrast on some semantic scale the real state of affairs with the conventional meaning, thus their scheme is relatively exact. Not so the schemes of oxymoron and tautology, that were dealt little by both semantics and pragmatics. Idioms are not considered as independent figures by the author, since they are either metaphoric or metonymic, moreover their meaning is conventional. Thus, they are interesting exclusively to the functional perspective view of pragmatics (e.g., Verschueren 1999). Rhetorical questions (often dealt as a figure of speech) are, in fact, a kind of indirect speech acts: they do not transform the conventional meaning of the question, but they complete it with an indirect intention.

The relation between semantics and pragmatics had been modeled in many ways. The two basic types are the traditional linear and the “intrusion” approach. Concerning the first, the borderline of linguistics and communication is exactly where the semantic interpretation ends, producing the sentence-meaning. Semantic interpretation needs the deictic variables’ content to top up. Indexical pragmatics, however, covers simple contextual anchoring and not a Gricean inference. In logical semantics, sentence-meaning is identified with the truth-conditional meaning. There are cases, however, when truth conditions can-

not be determined without the help of Gricean pragmatics. Therefore, the non-linear models divide pragmatics into two parts: one is wedged in before the model-theoretic interpretation, while the other is fit after it as it is usual (cf. Levinson 2000). No matter how we form the hierarchy of linguistic levels, merely with this scheme we say little about the functioning of the online understanding. The outline of the cognitive architecture that the author describes at the end of Chapter 2 is more relevant. The most worthy to emphasize is the lexicon–syntax interface relation: the dissertation notes several examples which renders probable that syntactical analysis helps the selection of the figurative meaning. The proposal striving for synthesis gives the “concession” to contextualism that the meanings activated by the previous context, still if they are normally not salient meanings, even before the first phase of the lexical reach, can rise, can be ranked ahead (we can call it *ad hoc* hierarchy-forming among the meanings of the units of the lexicon), however, they will not overtake the much more stronger salient meanings for sure. This idea can be reconciled with Giora’s theory.

III.

Contemporary research on figurative language concentrates on the issue of understanding, that is, it examines figurative meanings from the viewpoint of the receiver and of the interpretation, which is the consequence of the “cognitive revolution.” However, without an adequate and continuous empiric feedback, the balance turns over between production and understanding, between the enforcement of the perspective and the encasement in the theory of the speaker and the listener. A revealing sign is that, instead of the analyses of real, documented linguistic corpora, we meet only isolated or created statements, artificial contexts, and idealized examples. This practice can be the source of several oversimplified conclusions or even of misunderstanding. It is important to take the parallel quantitative and qualitative data collection or treatment, and the genre into account. The third part of the dissertation is thus concerned with the three basic questions

of the neglected production: (1) the relative frequency of the figures, (2) their co-occurrence, and (3) the discourse goals they accomplish or can fulfill in communication.

First, Chapter 3 surveys and reviews from a methodical point of view those studies that have opened the way in order to study the production through reporting statistically valid surveys. After considering their consequences and deficiencies, the author’s own corpus will be studied. From the comparison it will come to light what we can state about the frequency and the association of the figures compared to one another and what may be dependent upon language, genre, or personality traits. The corpus of the dissertation is made up by video recordings of different genres: feature films (since the motives of the actors appearing on stage are transparent, while the situations described remind us of the episodes and conversational style of everyday life), sport-broadcastings (for its language use is abundant with figures of speech), scientific-educational lectures, and formal/informal studio talks. Talking about conversational goals, mainly discourse analysis based on some social psychological categories (attitude, face, roles, identification, self-presentation, etc.) receive emphasis as the advantages of qualitative view compared to the classification based on the opinion of informants.

Evidences from the comparison show that amongst metaphors, exaggerations, and metonymies the conventional forms are superior, contrary to irony, which is in most cases particular (however, there are typical irony-clichés: e.g., “very funny,” “big deal”). If we were to create a frequency hierarchy above genres based on these data, it would look like as follows: metaphor > hyperbole > irony > metonymy > litotes > tautology > oxymoron. The least sensitive is metaphor, in both conventional and nonconventional categories. The second position of exaggeration and the third position of metonymy are more stable than the first positions in the usual way of expression. For irony, informal context is the favorable surrounding, thus it is highly genre-dependent. Litotes, tautology, and oxy-

moron are partially genre-dependent as well, however, at least in the chosen speech genres, they are rather scarce, compared to the previous ones.

Among figurative combinations, hyperbolic metaphors total nearly 50% of the data, which supports Kreuz et al.'s (1996) study with similarly high results. Thus, there is no doubt about this being the most frequent figurative complex. Also, ironic litotes and metonymical exaggeration are representative. The doublet of ironic exaggeration (or hyperbolic irony) and of the combinations of metaphor with metonymy, irony, and litotes are moderate. Metonymical irony and litotes, however, can only be spotted occasionally in the texts. Oxymoron and tautology are rare in themselves, thus we cannot say more in connection with them that the possibility of their co-occurrence is minimal (just like the tautological exaggerations and litoteses). There are only a few sources about threefold overlaps. There are examples in the corpus for triplets of metaphor-litotes-irony and metonymy-litotes-irony. In addition, metaphor-exaggeration-irony, metonymy-exaggeration-irony, metaphor-metonym-irony/exaggeration(-irony) and metaphor-metonymy-litotes(-irony) combinations are possible.

The social psychological branch of discourse analysis, which the author mostly relies on during the investigation of the conversational goals, studies the way the participants of the interaction maintain and promote their social relations, using the means of language and their skills in using them. In other words, it would like to shed light on the creative and regulative power of language (Robinson 1985; Potter–Wetherell 1987; Iñiguez–Antaki 1994). The place of the figure in the material of conversation, the exact knowledge of the conversational situation can share such information with the analyst that is needed to understand the pragmatic role of the expression analyzed. The thoroughness of the analysis, however, does not exclude the possibility to generalize.

It is worth making a distinction between *instrumental* and *interpersonal goals* when we are talking about conversational goals. Instrumental goals are guiding cognitive representations of an acting individual's behavior about how to

reach the reality-conditions that help to feel happy, regardless of the social context. Some of the desired consequences are biologically determined: self-preservation, safety, and the basic need for comfort are in their background. Others can be traced back to higher humanistic needs such as self-expression, fulfillment of one's duty, spiritual and material growth, and ambition for carrier. The actor tries to find the optimal instruments to fulfill his or her of instrumental goals (that is why it is called "instrumental"). This means in case of linguistic communication the observance of Grice's maxims and of Zipf–Kasher–Horn's theory of economy (maximal profit, minimal effort). Recently, Enikő Németh T. (2004) classified the principles of the previously received explaining theories to the class of "rationality principles." She differentiated them from the "interpersonality principles" such as Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle and its maxims, and the face-saving, impression-management and other types of socially oriented generalizations of communicative language use. The parallelism to the recommended dichotomies of conversational goals is not accidental. Politeness, self-presentation, adjustment to the partners, the practicing of the control in different situations are interpersonal goals. We can say the same about the relationship of the instrumental and interpersonal goals as Leech says about the interaction of the illocutionary goals and social goals. There are four cases: (i) competitive (ordering, asking, demanding, begging etc.); (ii) convivial (offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating, etc.); (iii) collaborative (asserting, instructing, reporting, announcing etc.), or (iv) conflictive (threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding, etc.). In concrete situations, we have to compare the different kinds of goals, if they do not coincide. Interpersonal considerations characteristically influence the form of linguistic communication as factors increasing the expenses of the speaker. This pushes the statement's meaning structure from its most economical direct strategy to different versions of indirectness. The process of consideration, the findings of the relative hierarchy of opposite goals are rational in case of rational agents, based on a cost-benefit calculation. The pragmat-

ic scales discussed by Leech (indirectness, optionality, power–solidarity, etc.) can be fit to the linguistic “outcome.” One extreme is to give totally up the instrumental goals, or to judge them over (such as the so-called “white lie”), the other extreme is to neglect the interpersonal considerations, to be direct badly, without “redressive” action. People try to find the correct degree of indirectness between these two extremes, and they form their statements according to it.

Admitting the fact that the goals in conversation are very complex and often ambiguous, the uncertainty of many of the linguistic statements is more understandable. It is widely accepted that the figurative meaning of tropes, without some loss, cannot be paraphrased with a literal expression. An old and difficult question is how we could account for the layers of meaning that go beyond the paraphrase with more exact terminology. The concept of connotation, according to the author, cannot give a satisfying solution, since it is just as plastic as those associations originating from the use of language that generations of researchers wished to describe with it. A new idea comes from relevance theory. It claims that implicatures of a statement may be of different strength, and what was traditionally called ‘poetic effect’ is, in fact, a cluster of “weak” implicatures. One of the novelties of the dissertation is that it makes a distinction between three types of weak implicatures and demonstrates them within figurative meaning: (1) conceptual implicature, (2) attitude-implicature, and (3) self-implicature. By weak implicature we can refer to those building bits of the statement’s intentional field of meaning whose cognitive representation is not a proposition, but some sort of an analogue form. The typology of weak implicatures is supported by several examples in the dissertation.

IV.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical traditions and critically evaluates the models of understanding. Chapter 3 studies the basic questions of production from an empiric point of view. Then, the dissertation gives an in-depth pragmatic

account of hyperbole. The author reviews the difficulties of definition, the linguistic realizations, the characteristics of interpretation and, furthermore, those types of discourse goals that hyperbole fulfills during everyday communications. The chapter relies on the previous parts of the dissertation, on other essays from the author, and on those researches that were published recently (McCarthy–Carter 2004; Kiefer 2004; Norrick 2004). Most of the examples are taken from the above mentioned corpus.

The term *hyperbole* of classical rhetoric can be traced back to the Greek compound *ὑπερβολή* (‘transgression’, ‘immoderateness’). Its first component means ‘over, beyond’, while *-bole* is derived from the verb *ballein* (‘to through, to cast’). It is an immutational or adjectival word figure and a figure of thought, an extreme, literally implausible onomastic surpassing of the *verbum proprium* with evocative, poetical effect, used as an aid to stimulating the imagination. Aristotle has observed that exaggerations include some sort of youthfulness and hotheadedness, thus he does not suggest its use for elder people (The “art” of *rhetoric*, 1413a). In Quintilian’s approach: *decens veri superiectio*, the elegant overstatement of reality (*Institutio oratoria*, 8.6.67). In its literal meaning, it is clearly a lie or distortion, but its aim is not to mislead, but to lead to the truth, and through saying something unbelievable it fixes what should be believed (Fontanier /1968). Hyperbole, thus, must stay believable; it should not violate reality too much, while it crosses the boundaries of reality. Quintilian reminds the speakers of the danger of affectation and ridicule, since exaggeration is a decoration to the speech only when the subject in itself is better than the usual. “Exaggeration in such a situation is tenable, since we cannot catch up with reality, and it is always nicer if the speech surpasses its intention than if it succumbs,” as he writes after stating that simple folks, even uneducated peasants use hyperboles quite often. “To show things exaggerated or diminished; nobody is satisfied with mere reality,” which is a sin that can be forgiven, unless in case of logical proofing.

Hyperbole succeeds in two ways: augmentations and extreme diminutions are both belong to the concept. Fónagy (2001) refers to overstatement with the expressions “partial lie” and “reduced truth value”, which are expressive, but not exact enough. However, the common basics can be discovered: each exaggeration is followed by the thought that there is a more adequate linguistic expression referring to reality to say what the speaker wants, but for some reason or goal, s/he intends to express something more. This means that on the imaginary scale of augmentation the reality perspective is pushed towards infinity, or it is pushed towards zero in the dimension of diminution. After analyzing these examples and considerations, the author comes to the following conclusion about the definition of the hyperbole: it is a *pragmatic figure* (or, in a broader sense, a *meaning figure*), which disproportionately augments (on the relevant semantic scale of exaggeration compared to the adequate notation the expression is transferred towards infinity, sometimes with emphatic repetition) or disproportionately reduces (on the relative semantic scale of reduction approaching the expression to zero, sometimes with emphatic repetition) one part or phenomenon of reality or a possible world.

Hyperbole is a ubiquitous figure of speech. Kreuz and his colleges (1996) have found in the set of figurative segments used in short stories amounting to 100 pages, that exaggeration has a portion of 27% which is only a bit behind compared to the 29% of metaphor, which is ranked first according to the data. The control analysis of the author supports this finding with the addition that the majority of the hyperboles are conventional expressions. Furthermore, exaggeration is a characteristic of certain genres: it is much more typical to informal than of formal ones. In literature, exaggeration is the stylistic instrument mainly of the baroque and of romanticism, heroic epics, and of folktales. It cannot be omitted from the commercials of the modern era, from radio and television sports broadcasting or from talk shows. On the contrary, it is stigmatized in academic discourse (especially in written texts), and in technical terminology. Cor-

pus linguistics provides more and more data bases containing many contexts. These give an option to observe the repetition of lexico-grammatical realizations (from which we can estimate the level of conventionality), to compare parts of different semantic fields, and last but not least, to enforce the interactive viewpoint with the examination of the partners' reactions (acceptance, correction, literal understanding, laughter, more exaggeration, etc.). Kreuz and his colleagues note that according to the above mentioned data, the phenomenon of hyperbole should be given more attention than it is attested by the small amount of relevant publications and of their modest theoretical development.

Frequency comes together with high variation in the linguistic form. This also means that exaggeration is often combined with other figures (except with litotes, tautology, and oxymoron). In Hungarian, the prefix of the excessive, even without context, reveals the presence of hyperbole. Kiefer (2004) discusses the morphopragmatic characteristics of this phenomenon, emphasizing that there is no difference between the excessive and the superlative from a semantic point of view. However, the excessive, contrary to the superlative, has certain pragmatic meaning as well. It is interesting that the unlimitedly productive excessive (it can be added to any adjective in comparative) can be multiplied. The hyperbolic and non-hyperbolic use of universal quantifiers (*always, never, all, everybody, nobody*, etc.) shows relationship to the use of the superlative.

Hyperbole is able to separate the numeral from the concrete concept of the number. Especially *zero, dozens of, hundreds of, thousands of*, and *million* appears in everyday clichés. The lexicalized cases of geminatio (as the direct repetition of words and word groups are called by rhetoric) are *very very, long long way*, etc. We cannot omit exaggerations as a figure of thought: besides the variants that are concentrated into one word and easy to collect from the computer corpora, there are many statements where the meaning as a thought surpasses the reality known by all.

There are two ideas in pragmatics about how people are able to understand hyperbolic expressions. One of them is Grice's theory. He explains the fact that the receiver, instead of the conventional meaning, starts searching for the implicature suitable for the real situation, noticing the violation of the first maxim of Quality. The other is Sperber and Wilson's theory. In their account, exaggeration, similarly to metaphor, is a case of "loose talk:" the propositional form of the statement is divergent from the form of the thought that we want to express, but the two share logical and contextual implications. Since the speaker do not find a literary paraphrase that would satisfactorily exhaust all that the hyperbole can express, thus, according to the theory of relevance, s/he concentrates a greater contextual effect into the words in order to make it worthy for the reader to infer the intended meaning from it. The author argues in favor of Grice's theory, but he thinks that a few specifications are indispensable.

First, the first maxim of Quality is not the only (however it is undoubtedly the most common) trigger of exaggeration. McCarthy and Carter (2004) draws attention to the fact that hyperboles are often introduced by words such as *nearly*, *almost*, *literally* (e.g., *It was literally a prison cell wasn't it*—talking about a room of a dormitory), which make the absurd, extravagant exaggeration or reduction more "believable." They call them "footing-shift markers." Footing-shift markers make a new frame of interpretation, overruling literality. The new frame is a kind of joint pretence between the speaker and the listener, in order to make everything that is uttered more realistic. Exaggeration is not deceiving, since the "ideal" lie does not give any sign, it does not reveal itself. The dissertation raises some objections against the view that relates hyperbole (and litotes) to the category of Quantity, instead of the category of Quality, on the basis that the two figures deform reality quantitatively. This means that instead of giving just as much information as required, more or less is given. Grice's point of view is the correct one: the exaggerated meaning is *qualitatively different* from its adequate

correspondent; it is not more (or less) informative than is necessary, but it is conventionally false information.

All that we need to know about the rhetorical use of exaggeration is summarized in Fónagy's (1975) article. In everyday conversations three main functions can be differentiated according to the examples: (1) expression of an attitude, (2) persuasion (namely to make your partner or partners accept your attitude) and (3) self-presentation. The expression of the attitude is inseparable from the figure of hyperbole. It is the typical, however not inherent concomitant of the persuading goal (e.g., such commercial clichés like "breath-taking collection", "fantastic offer", etc.). To reveal the functions of self-presentation or impression management one must know the context and the motives of the speaker thoroughly. Feature films are perfect for this research. The two basic strategies of self-presentation are the defensive and the assertive (acquisitive) strategies. Both are illustrated and analyzed in the dissertation.

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