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The Role of Conceptual Metaphor in the Creation of Discourse  
Coherence –

Investigating 17<sup>th</sup>-century French Prose of Jansenist Inspiration  
through the Works of Blaise Pascal and François de La Rochefoucauld

THESES OF THE DISSERTATION

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## **I. Introduction and research justification**

This PhD thesis presents the analysis of a selected literary corpus within the interpretative framework of conceptual metaphor theory. The research covered a small but representative segment of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French prose of Jansenist inspiration. The main corpus consisted of four texts produced by two authors, namely Blaise Pascal's *On the Geometrical Spirit and The Art of Persuasion* (*De l'Esprit géométrique et de l'art de persuader*, 1658) and *Thoughts* (*Pensées*, 1670), and François de La Rochefoucauld *Memoirs* (*Mémoires*, 1662) and *Maximes* (its original title being *Sentences et maximes morales* 1664-65). In addition to the four core texts, I also quoted some of the thematically related passages of Pascal's *The Provincial Letters* (*Lettres provinciales*, 1656-1657) and of La Rochefoucauld's *Self-portrait* (*Portrait de M.R.D. fait de lui-même*, 1659).

Considered as one of the most dynamically developing sub-disciplines of Cognitive Linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory (henceforth CMT, Lakoff & Johnson 1980) has proved its applicability in interdisciplinary humanities research. CMT synthesizes the latest results from linguistics, psychology, neurobiology, philosophy and cultural studies, thereby creating the possibility for a more analytical and comprehensive understanding of literary texts (Kövecses 2005). It aims at unfolding the cause-effect relations between the intra- and extratextual realities of the text by examining the conceptual, cultural, and ideological factors lying beyond the manifest linguistic level.

## **II. Research goals and hypothesis**

To the best of my knowledge, there have been few examples to make use of the possibilities offered by CMT within the field of early modern era research (Mussolff 2010, Szentpéteri 2016). This PhD thesis is therefore an attempt to compensate for this lack. The research goals were twofold. First, the metaphor and metonymy networks identified in the corpus were interpreted as the indicators of how the texts integrated into the philosophical, religious, ideological and literary trends of the era (Tüskés 2015; Aradi 2017). Second, by approaching the same question from a text linguistics perspective, it became possible to examine how metaphor and metonymy contribute to the discourse coherence. As CMT emphasizes the dynamic nature of the literary text (Lakoff & Turner 1989; Kövecses 2005: 59-67), it attributes a primary role to contextual factors in the creation of meaning, seeking to decipher the potentially hidden layers of interpretation.

The principle of CMT is that metaphor and metonymy are not primarily tropes but conceptual categories (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 6; Kövecses & Benczes 2010: 79-80). The human mind, organized along verbal propositions and visual representations, is essentially figurative or, more precisely, metaphorical. Being conceptual in nature, metaphor is not confined to language: it plays an active role in all areas of cognition, including traditions, arts, historical and political discourses. Metaphor is inherently shaped by socio-cultural environment and physical experience. Research conducted over the past few decades in the joint fields of anthropology, neurobiology and linguistics has revealed that this process is not unilateral: culture, body and metaphor influence one and another in dynamic interaction (Yu 2008).

Accepting Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen's definition of literature being "a specific form of everyday human experience and especially cognition" (2003: 1-2), it logically follows that everyday and literary metaphors differ only in the level of creativity (Lakoff & Turner 1989: xi; Kövecses 2005: 60). The relative ease with which the human mind grasps literary metaphors is the result of a shared conceptual basis (Semino & Steen 2008), a hypothesis that has been reinforced by neurobiological research suggesting a direct neural connection between the motor cortex and the higher cognitive areas of the brain (Lakoff & Gallese 2005; Lakoff 2008). The concept of a universal architecture of thought is further justified by the fact that the psychological functions and processes operating the human mind (including metaphor) are the same across cultures, or they show strong resemblances even when subject to variability (Kövecses 2005: 187-188; Kövecses & Benczes 2010: 95-96). It can therefore be assumed that metaphors or metaphor networks identified in a given text and/or discourse are similar at the conceptual, structural, and/or linguistic level, independently of genre, which can contribute to the understanding of intertextual properties. At the same time, the analyzed metaphors may show visible differences with regard to textual functions, genre requirements, and the author's viewpoint (intentions, religious and political convictions). These differences can manifest themselves at the conceptual, structural, and/or linguistic level of the text.

Taking all the above theoretical and methodological principles into consideration, the author of the thesis put forward the following research hypothesis: by extracting relevant information on the intra- and extratextual properties of the corpus through the analysis, comparison and systematic arrangement of its metaphors, it becomes possible to draw some novel conclusions on the whole of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French prose of Jansenist influence (especially on the app. 30-year period between 1650 and 1680). The analysis laid particular emphasis on the cultural, social, and political aspects of the texts, given the fact that the continuous interaction of intra- and extratextual realities has a strong impact on interpretation.

Diachronicity was also taken into account in order to compensate for any anachronistic reading that might occur.

### III. The corpus

The four texts giving the basic corpus of the research can all be considered representative of their era. In his essays *On the Geometrical Spirit* and *The Art of Persuasion*, Pascal borrows the concept of unambiguous definition from geometry to develop his rhetorical method. The principles laid down in the essay will be put into practice in the complex argumentative structure of *Thoughts*.

Published posthumously in 1670, *Thoughts* is definitely one of the most frequently quoted works of French Jansenism. In what regards its form, *Thoughts* appears to be a fragmentary, largely incoherent piece of writing. When examined more thoroughly, however, it turns out that Pascal integrated the different contemporaneous theological and philosophical schools into his argumentation so systematically that the fragments form a coherent unity. In accordance with Pascal's original intention, *Thoughts* is destined to be read as the apology of Christian faith and of Jansenism (Descotes 1976 [In: *Pensées*: 13-28]). *The Provincial Letters*, written between 1656 and 1657, is a reflection of the theological debates between Port-Royal and the Sorbonne, and, once again, a statement of faith.

Contrary to Pascal, François de La Rochefoucauld represented a "secular" form of Augustinian thinking. Among his published works, *Memoirs* (1662) is probably the least studied one despite its special position genre-wise. Although generally categorized as "historical memoirs" for chronicling the *Fronde*, La Rochefoucauld's work goes beyond the traditional historical narrative and provides the reader with an insight into the development of the author's moral world.

Whereas *Memoirs* has not been in the centre of scholarly attention, *Maxims* is considered to be a core text of the mid-1660s to this day. *Maxims* presents a moral philosophy that integrates questions of faith into everyday moral thinking, accentuating a more practical approach to ethics (Brunn 2015: 255). Distant from the meditative, apologetic language of Port-Royal, La Rochefoucauld's "social criticism" sheds light on the flaws of the individual and of society by re-interpreting the concept of *amour-propre* to a certain extent. When considering the two texts as markers of La Rochefoucauld's moral development, it is not implausible to assume that the disappointment and critical tone characterizing *Memoirs* was an inspiration to the writing of *Maxims*. The author's *Self-portrait*, published in 1659, is a

short self-description that can be seen as a precursor to both *Memoirs* and *Maxims* in what concerns the tone and the rhetorical strategies applied in the text.

The co-existence of the religious and the laical in moral discourse is part of the general trends of the era. While it is true that Pascal and La Rochefoucauld share a similar viewpoint in some of the most important questions of moral philosophy, they talk from different perspectives, and this is expected to manifest itself at both the conceptual and the textual level. The selected corpus mirrors the principal literary currents of 17<sup>th</sup>-century prose given that three out of the four core texts belong to the then extremely popular short genres, and *Memoirs* is an example of the increasingly fashionable autobiographical genre (Charbonneau 2016).

#### **IV. Method of analysis**

Initially, the author was considering two possible models of analysis: the chronology-based and the motif-centred approaches. The advantage of the former is that it presents the results in a temporally linear logic, accentuating the historicity of the analysis. While CMT does take diachronicity into consideration (historical cognitive linguistics works on this principle), privileging temporal linearity over other factors will inevitably lead to a shifted perspective, and the conclusions of the research will reflect an overwhelmingly historical viewpoint. To avoid this, the author opted for the theme-centred method of analysis that concentrates on the conceptual and associative network of the metaphors, bearing in mind the advantages of the diachronic aspect.

#### **V. Structure of the dissertation and principal results**

Following the general introduction, the first two chapters of the dissertation contain the literary review. The first one presents conceptual metaphor theory in detail, emphasizing its relevance in literature and in the philosophy of sciences. The second chapter provides a brief historical overview of Jansenism including its theological, philosophical, and the rhetorical aspects. The third chapter of the dissertation presents the detailed analysis of the metaphors and metaphor networks identified in the corpus. In accordance with the model presented above, the structure of the analysis was determined not by the geneses of the texts but by the metaphors and their relations to one and another. The research identified several interrelated motifs, namely (1) the physical and moral representations of the *self* (literary self-portrait and portrait); (2) the conceptualization of *amour-propre* through spatial metaphors; (3) metaphors of SIGHT and LIGHT in describing the individual's spiritual journey to God; (4) THE GREAT

CHAIN OF BEING metaphor, and (5) the BODY metaphor, in which the heart and the blood circulation occupy a special place.

#### V.1. The physical and moral representations of the *self*

Apart from being a literary reflection of the contemporaneous artistic trends, the self-portrait and the portrait are the metaphors of limited self-knowledge. Besides writing the literary portrait of several of his contemporaries, La Rochefoucauld also composed his own self-portrait. In his self-description, he considers his physical characteristics as the visual projections of his psychological disposition. The image of the introspective, melancholic author bears some similarities with the lonely, meditative Augustinian thinker and it also foreshadows the pessimistic worldview of *Maxims*.

#### V.2. The conceptualization of *amour-propre* through spatial metaphors

The notion of *amour-propre* ('self-love') is in the centre of La Rochefoucauld's concept of man and society. In the 17<sup>th</sup>-century moral philosophical discourse *amour-propre* means the inherent duplicity of human nature, the hidden *self* whose only motivation is its self-interest and possesses an infinite desire for power. The French scholar Éric Tourette (2012) introduced the terms 'egology' (égologie) and 'egological space' (espace égologique) in relation to La Rochefoucauld's theory of the social *self*. Basically, egology is the linguistic realization of the *amour-propre*: every instance of interpersonal communication is actually a reinforcement of one's self-esteem and social status. This practice creates a closed, isolated egological space in which the *amour-propre* continuously recreates itself. Once the notion of egology is applied to religious discourse, a new node emerges: the Augustinian understanding of *amour-propre* is tightly connected to hypocrisy, a social phenomenon despised by the Port-Royal circle. Also, the presence of the SPACE metaphor (COMMUNICATION SPACE IS A CLOSED PHYSICAL SPACE) makes it possible to consider the compatibility of CMT with Tourette's psychological approach.

### V.3. Metaphors of SIGHT and LIGHT

The metaphoricity revealed in literary self-portrait and in the concept of *amour-propre* pointed to a third group of metaphors, this time related to the concepts of *sight* and *light*. Sight has always occupied a privileged position in the hierarchy of senses, and light has been a frequent source domain of metaphors conceptualizing life, knowledge and spiritual entities. The binary oppositions of sight/blindness and light/darkness powerfully construct both authors' argumentation, primarily in passages on self-reflection, death and religious experience. Taking all differences into account, it can be stated that Pascal and La Rochefoucauld reach very similar conclusions with regard to man's place in the universe: having lost their once stable and central position in the hierarchy of beings, the mankind cannot find its way out of the darkness.

### V.4. THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor

The fourth major motif of the analysis was the great chain of being, an omnipresent ideological model that has shaped social order and thinking since the beginning of institutionalized religion. However, the successive paradigm shifts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century questioned the very foundation of the model (Foucault 1996). Pascal himself also rejects the idea of the great chain as there is no reason to postulate any rigid hierarchy in a decentred universe of infinite spaces. While retaining the truth value of the previous statement, the analysis showed that the idea of the great chain still prevails in Pascal's argumentation. Viewed as a metaphor (a mega-metaphor for that matter), the great chain is a conceptually flexible and permutable structure, meaning that the levels within the hierarchy can be defined in terms of one another. The analysis brought to surface three metaphors that can be interpreted as manifestations of this conceptual operation, namely, NATION IS FAMILY, GOD IS AN AUTHORITATIVE FATHER and the general ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM metaphor, with its source domain being the HUMAN BODY. The strong presence of these metaphors underpins the initial assumption that despite the fundamental changes that shattered the Renaissance world, the great chain of being continued to dominate the conceptual system of the collective mind.

#### V.5. ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE HUMAN BODY: THE HEART

The last metaphor group was the ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE HUMAN BODY with particular focus on the motif of the *heart*. The heart is an essential element of the Jansenist discourse as it is strongly embedded into the idea of dualism (the human being is composed of body and soul) as well as into the relationship of man to God. Pascal's approach to the role of the body in cognition leaves us with a complex view of the heart. The results of the analysis suggest that the heart is both a source and a target domain, depending on the topic and the perspective adopted in the given passage. The uncovering of the HEART metaphors has also shown that William Harvey's milestone work on blood circulation had an important influence on Pascal's theory of cognition and religious apology. The same motifs can be detected in La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* as well, and particularly in connection to the *amour-propre*. In fact, the maxims analyzed in this sub-chapter bear strong resemblance to Jansenist rhetoric. This re-examination of *Maxims* from the perspective of the body led to some novel conclusions on La Rochefoucauld's concept of the *amour-propre*: far from being a purely psychological entity, it also influences physiological processes by "insinuating" into body fluids (mostly into the blood).

The final chapter of the dissertation revisits the research goals and hypothesis, summarizes the most important conclusions, and touches upon the possible directions of future research in the topic.



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