

Metaphor and Exlibris

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Abstract

The subject of metaphor has been studied from the rhetoric in the Ancient ages until today in different areas like philosophy, linguistics, semantics, education and psychology. Metaphor has a significant place in present post-modern discourse and it is open to multidisciplinary approaches as a concept. Metaphors in art and design are carrier elements that form the conceptual structure and content configuration of a work. In this sense, metaphors constitute the backbone of a work and studying their relations with the art of exlibris is an area that provides broad opportunities where secret links can be discovered.

Keywords: Exlibris, metaphor, theory of conceptual metaphor

Introduction

The concept of metaphor was derived from the Greek word “metapherein” (meta: beyond, top; pherein: carry) which means carrying a phenomenon beyond itself and loading more than itself. The subject of metaphor has been studied from the rhetoric in the Ancient ages until today in different areas like philosophy, linguistics, semantics, education and psychology. Metaphor has a significant place in present post-modern discourse and it is open to multidisciplinary approaches as a concept. Metaphors in art and design are carrier elements that form the conceptual structure and content configuration of a work. In this sense, metaphors constitute the backbone of a work and studying their relations with the art of exlibris is an area that provides broad opportunities where secret links can be discovered.

The word exlibris literally means “from the books of...” or “from the library of...” and it can be defined as a small prints pasted by the booklovers on the inside front cover including their names and pictures of various subjects on it” (Pektaş, 2003: 11). Exlibris is specific to a person or organization while this study will deal only with the person-specific works. Exlibris is a work of art introducing the owner of a book as a sign of property. Therefore, it comprises of attempts to reflect the characteristics of the owner. This introduces a complex link between exlibrises and the concept of metaphor. A conceptual network of metaphors between the exlibris artist, the person that the exlibris is done for, and the viewers creates a rich area of study that is worth to research.

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The Concept Of Metaphor

Starting with Aristoteles, the ancient Greek philosopher, there have been studies on metaphor in many areas like rhetoric, linguistics, philosophy, semiotics, psychology, education and art. Until the 20th century, the concept of metaphor has been studied and included in researches as a linguistic phenomenon. Contrary to the traditional view that regards metaphor as a function of indirect expression in language, modern approaches consider the concept of metaphor to be a more comprehensive subject that underlies our conceptual system (Lyddon, W. J., Clay, A. L. and Sparks, C. L. 2001). Particularly the modern metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson includes pioneering approaches that influence many disciplines. In their work called “Metaphors We Live By” published in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphor underlay our conceptual system which guided our thoughts and actions in daily life beyond being a linguistic phenomenon. They suggested that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature”

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 3). The study of Lakoff & Johnson is also called as the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and it is based on the idea that the natural intellectual functioning of human beings is metaphorical. Brain functions by the method of perceptual concretization of the abstract by turning a concept into another one. This unconscious functioning takes place unnoticed by the person. “Conceptual metaphor system is usually used automatically in the unconscious without any effort like our system of using language and the remaining of our conceptual system (Lakoff, 1993, 245). Our conceptual metaphor system functions automatically and continuously under the level of conscience. In this scope, metaphors can be defined as comprehending a concept by associating it to another concept belonging to another semantic field. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 5). Metaphors allows the association to the previously existing concepts in the brain to understand and explain a new phenomenon. In another words, metaphors describe “an unknown subject” with “a known subject”.

Metaphors are strong instruments of mental mapping and modelling with respect to understanding and explaining the world. Saban, A., Koçbeker, B.N., and Saban, A. (2006, 463) describe this as follows: “From the standpoint of the cognitive theory, metaphors act as powerful mental models through which people understand their world by relating complex phenomena to something previously experienced and concrete. And it is this process of building linkages between two dissimilar ideas (the known and the abstract) or the projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema (the target domain of the metaphor) that makes a metaphor an effective cognitive device. In this sense, metaphors allow one to see something as something else by making one’s mind move itself from a way of understanding to another”. In another words, metaphor is the process of linkage between a complex phenomenon and the information that already exists in the mine for the perception and understanding of a subject from the perspective of another.

Visual Metaphor And Image

Lakoff and Johnson revealed that metaphor was a basic concept within our intellectual system rather than being a phenomenon that was previously trapped into the field of linguistics. The conceptual metaphor theory influenced and triggered further studies to deal with the metaphor subject in many different disciplines. There were studies on the metaphor concept in the fields of art and design. In this sense, it would be appropriated to put emphasis on visual metaphor.

We mostly use our sense of vision when we perceive the world that we live in. Therefore, the power of visual is more than the words. This power provides a more effective result when the visual is used in a metaphorical subject. According to Shuell (1990, 102) “If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures! For a picture provides only a static image while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something”. Visual metaphors make an unknown thing closer to the functioning principle of our conceptual metaphor system. According to Freud, metaphoric thinking is closer to the ideas that are expressed to the unconscious by words and is undisputedly older ontologically and phylogenetic (Modell, 2009) (Karairmak and Güloğlu, 2012, 126).

It is commonly believed that the visual images are the same with the expression in languages. Linguistic expression and visual images may have the same meaning. However, the searches on visual language theories indicate that the communication with visual language should be evaluated differently from the other communication models. “In fact, visual communication can and often does refer to ‘things’ that have no verbal translation at all (Morris, 1993,196). While language is perhaps more precise in expressing some areas of meaning, other meanings may be shown more easily and more effectively in images rather than in words” (Refaie, 2003, 84).

The fact that visual metaphors are more indirect and complicated than verbal metaphors causes possible implications to take place (Phillips, 2000). Visual metaphors provide more effective functioning of the cognitive evaluation system in the explanation process and lead the viewers to have more active thinking on it. The increase in the cognitive activity has interesting outcomes. The increase in the cognitive evaluation experienced in the message processing causes an increase in the persuasiveness of the premise. Several studies (Messaris, 1997; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Scott, 1994) state that visual metaphors are more persuasive than the verbal metaphors. “Greater degree of mental participation required by visual argumentation may lead to a product of audiences’ own construction of meaning (Proctor et al., 2005) and because people are often more willing to adopt a proposition that they have constructed, the implicitness of visual argumentation can be a strong point of visual persuasion (Messaris, 1997, 167) (Jeong, 2008, 62). The complexity in visual arguments also causes an increase in the mental activity of the viewer. The researches indicate that the complexity and enhancement level of the used visual metaphors have an increasing effect on the acclaim of the viewer. That is, the acclaim of the viewer is the same with the cognitive effectiveness of the viewer. When we

consider the subject with respect to exlibris, we can argue that the viewers will be affected in parallel to the depth of the metaphors used.

There is strong linkage between image and metaphor. Image is a concept beyond the representation of an object. Being an image of an entity doesn't refer to being a copy of it. When defining an image, Berger (1999, 10) states that it is understood that image becomes more permanent than the thing that is visualized although image is done to visualize what is initially not there. There is meaning and interpretation for both metaphor and image. These meanings can be partially solved by semiotics. Reading the relation between the main concepts of semiotics, i.e. signifier and signified may help understanding the metaphors and images in the work. At this point, however, we need to take into consideration that our conceptual metaphor system is formed in the unconscious. The meaning (in the work) of the concept of metaphor from the unconscious or what it intends to show can only be explained to a certain extent in the level of conscience. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are the elements that vary from culture to culture and they are difficult to understand only by semiotic readings. As metaphors come from the unconscious, it is certain that one cannot reach it at the level of conscience. We need to state here that the fact that the main meaning of metaphor cannot be fully explained by various analysis methods doesn't mean that it is hidden. The "signified" in visual metaphors cannot be explained for sure by linguistic expressions, however, it can be sensed by the person through its non-linear functioning.

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Exlibris and Metaphor

Although exlibris is a work of art created by aesthetic concerns, it is also a graphics of necessity and a significant means of communication (Pektaş, 1999, 2). Therefore, an exlibris is expected to be a unique work of art with high functional and aesthetic value. As a work of art with tradition, it is necessary that the picture and writing used in the exlibris would symbolize the owner. It should be designed specifically to the person or organization that the exlibris is done for" (Pektaş, 2002, 2). The artist attempts to create a set of images that describe the person to whom the exlibris is done by focusing on aesthetic concerns in the process of creation. In the unconscious of the artist, there is already a metaphoric linkage in the unconscious of the artist about the person to whom the exlibris is done even before starting the work. At this stage, we need to remind once more that metaphor is a supplement of our conceptual system with a basic role to define our daily realities rather than being a simple analogy and an element bringing pleasantness to the visual. In addition to the metaphors that are consciously used by the artist, every image in the exlibris reflects the unconscious life of

the artist and his perception of the addressed person (to whom the exlibris is dedicated). In this context, like in the other works of art, the fact that the design in the exlibris implies another thing while showing one thing is caused by the multi-layered structure of metaphors. On the other hand, the reflected nature of the person, to whom the exlibris is dedicated, has also a metaphoric structure. The concretization of this abstract perception with images through exlibris is a product of two-way metaphor comprehension and tides between the artist and the person to whom the exlibris is dedication. Inclusion of viewers into this two-way structure creates a complex metaphoric network system.

The metaphoric work of art that is concretized in exlibris is perceived by the viewers through their unique metaphoric comprehension. Visual metaphors are interpreted depending on the background of the viewer. In the process of perception and interpretation of visual metaphors, it cannot be expected that all viewers would reach to a single unit by viewing a single channel. According to Refaie (2003, 89) “the high context dependency of many visual metaphors means that their meaning is often implicit and that they tend to be open to quite a wide range of interpretations”. Every individual who looks at an exlibris experiences a process of evaluation that includes unique experience and assumptions. The composition used in the exlibris that includes elements like illustration, photography, pattern, colour and typography is perceived after being synthesized by the knowledge, experience, expectation and value judgement of the viewer. In this context, the viewer provides a direct contribution to the interpretation of the work by analysing the conceptual structure created by the artist and by establishing its own semantic sequence. Then it is obvious that the art viewer has not a passive role.

Conclusion

The fact that the metaphors are one of the basic intellectual models demonstrates that we all perceive life through metaphoric ways. A visual work of art bears unnoticed codes that lead to meanings beyond the conscience level of the artist and the viewer. According to A. A. Berger (2014, 29), “people carry codes around in their heads, highly complex patterns of associations that enable them to interpret metonymic communication correctly”, although it seems impossible to analyse such an intense metaphoric message. Given the linkage between visual metaphors and perception, meanings are perceived even if not uttered by tongue. With this perceptual relation, metaphors can be interpreted to be secret gateways that enable linkage to our deepest values.

A study in 1960 classified exlibris by subjects and found that 30% of them included erotic subjects, 20% dynasty arms, 15% landscape, 15% animals and vegetation and 10% various subjects (Pektaş, 2003). The results of this study inevitably brings to mind the studies of Freud on human and the unconscious. Exlibris are almost an instrument of expression of the metaphoric reflection of the collective subconscious of human beings. From this point of view, it can be said that exlibris is a product that creates a perfect linkage between people. This linkage provides a common metaphoric field between the exlibris artist, the person to whom the exlibris is done and the viewer.

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