LINGUOCULTURAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SIMILES: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This article examines similes from a linguocultural perspective and analyzes their role in reflecting cultural knowledge, national values, and cognitive processes. While traditional linguistic studies have primarily focused on the structural and semantic characteristics of similes, contemporary research increasingly emphasizes their function as carriers of cultural meaning. The study employs a qualitative review methodology based on six influential international sources. The findings demonstrate that similes function as mediators between language, cognition, and culture, revealing the worldview of a speech community.

Keywords: *simile, linguoculturology, cultural linguistics, cognitive linguistics, metaphor, worldview, cultural code.*

Similes constitute one of the most productive figurative devices in human language. Traditionally, they have been investigated as explicit comparative constructions involving a subject, a standard of comparison, and a marker of similarity. However, contemporary linguistic research suggests that similes perform functions that extend far beyond simple comparison. They participate in the conceptualization of reality, the transmission of cultural values, and the formation of national worldviews. The growing interest in linguocultural studies has created new opportunities for understanding similes as culturally motivated linguistic phenomena. Cultural linguistics assumes that language reflects collective knowledge accumulated by a speech community. Consequently, similes become important sources for exploring how societies perceive, categorize, and evaluate the surrounding world. The purpose of this article is to examine the theoretical foundations of simile studies within the linguocultural paradigm and to identify the relationship between comparison, cognition, and culture through an analysis of contemporary linguistic research.

One of the most influential theoretical contributions to simile studies is provided by Bredin, who defines similes as predicative comparisons that differ fundamentally from ordinary comparisons [1]. According to his approach, similes establish an explicit relationship between two entities while preserving their conceptual independence. From a linguocultural perspective, however, similes perform a broader function. They not only compare objects but also transmit cultural knowledge embedded in the collective consciousness of a linguistic community. Therefore, similes should be regarded as linguistic representations of cultural experience rather than purely grammatical constructions. Bredin’s classification of similes into several logical categories contributes significantly to understanding their structural diversity [1]. Nevertheless, his model pays limited attention to the cultural motivations behind the selection of

comparison standards. In our view, the cultural significance of the comparative standard often determines the communicative effectiveness of a simile.

The Cognitive Basis of Simile Formation. Recent cognitive studies have demonstrated that simile production involves complex mental operations. Kao argues that analogical thinking is central to human creativity and knowledge construction [2]. According to his model, simile creation includes three stages: identifying relevant features, searching semantic memory, and evaluating the appropriateness of the analogy [2]. The present study suggests that culture plays a crucial role throughout these stages. Individuals do not select comparative standards randomly; rather, they draw upon culturally shared concepts and values. Consequently, simile formation can be described as a linguocultural-cognitive process involving:

Identification of a salient feature;

Retrieval of culturally meaningful standards;

Linguistic encoding of similarity;

Evaluation according to cultural norms. This model explains why speakers of different languages often employ different similes to describe similar experiences. The relationship between similes and cultural worldviews becomes particularly evident in Read’s ecological approach to figurative language[3]. His research demonstrates that similarities may be perceived through visual, kinetic, emotional, and social dimensions[3]. Importantly, different individuals may interpret the same phenomenon through different comparative frameworks. Such variation supports the linguocultural assumption that figurative language reflects culturally conditioned patterns of perception. The choice of a particular simile often reveals social values, collective memories, and culturally dominant ways of understanding reality. For example, concepts associated with family, nature, religion, or heroism frequently become standards of comparison in many cultures. These recurring standards function as cultural codes that preserve and transmit collective knowledge across generations.

The distinction between similes and metaphors remains a central issue in figurative language research. Athanasiadou emphasizes that similes involve explicit comparison, whereas metaphors create direct conceptual mappings between domains[4]. Similes rely primarily on comparison processes, whereas metaphors involve categorization and semantic integration[5]. Despite these differences, both phenomena contribute to the construction of cultural meaning. Similes often provide the foundation from which metaphorical interpretations emerge. Therefore, rather than viewing similes and metaphors as entirely separate categories, it may be more productive to regard them as interconnected mechanisms for expressing culturally grounded conceptualizations. From our perspective, the universality of similative structures does not imply cultural uniformity. While the grammatical mechanisms of comparison may be similar across languages, the standards of comparison themselves are deeply rooted in specific cultural traditions and systems of values.

The study confirms that similes represent far more than explicit comparisons. They function as linguocultural units through which speakers conceptualize reality, communicate cultural values, and construct collective identities. The review of contemporary scholarship demonstrates that similes occupy an important position at the

intersection of language, cognition, and culture. Their formation involves culturally mediated cognitive processes, while their interpretation depends upon shared systems of knowledge and values.

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