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**MULTIMODAL, FILMIC METAPHORS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION PROCESS IN
SILENT FILMS**

Abstract

This paper explores the decoding process of a multimodal metaphor in silent films and discusses the results of ignoring the linguistic characteristics of the context. In addition, the conceptual and linguistic basis of a filmic metaphor is examined and the emphasis is put on the background knowledge and an emotional mood of a decoder. The data-based analysis and survey as well as the comparative method were used to analyse the findings of the research.

The aims of the paper are as follows:

1. To show the significance of the imagination, background knowledge and emotional mood of a decoder during the interpretation process of a filmic metaphor.
2. To reveal the consequences of ignoring the connection of the filmic metaphor and its linguistic context due to the importance of verbal metaphor and its conceptual significance.
3. To explore the character of the metaphor usage in Georgian (Republic) and American films considering the fact that the filmic metaphor either reveals or lacks its formal characteristics.
4. To define multimodal metaphor and its non-verbal characteristics;
5. Whittock's definition of a filmic metaphor and its isolation from the verbal conception; the theory of Uznadze discussing the role of emotional mood while decoding a metaphor, the suggestions of Roland Barthes concerning the varieties of narration.

The empirical data of this paper embrace the relevant examples from Georgian (Republic) and American films.

Keywords: *multimodal metaphor, filmic metaphor, decoding filmic metaphor, decoder's background knowledge, Narration.*

1. Introduction

The theoretical basis for this paper combines the linguistic and cinematographic approaches in order to identify the function of multimodal metaphors in both fields. Consequently, the overall aim of this paper is to observe the transformation process of multimodal metaphor from the written text into the film and the specificity of decoding of filmic metaphors, which are taken from silent. The findings of the study are analysed using the methods of data-based analysis, survey, and critical analysis. The survey was done through Facebook. A specially designed questionnaire and examples (brought from films) were used to as the empirical data of the study.

Despite technological development, silent cinema continues to exist as a genre in the 21st century and helps the director to express his/her views and still maintains its popularity.

Silent cinema is characterized by the employment of the multimodal metaphor as it includes both- dynamic pictures and the written text.

According to Whittock's theory, filmic metaphor is different from other types of metaphor (Whittock, 1990). Whittock claims to differentiate theoretical and functional sides of filmic metaphors. The basic aim of Whittock was to single out the cinematographic function of the metaphor that includes both, rhetoric and imaginary functions. Therefore, the integration process of an individual metaphor from a written text into a visual picture underlines its creative significance. Whittock suggests that the structural analysis of a filmic metaphor depends on its romantic and creative basis. Therefore, his metaphoric analysis of filmic metaphor is closer to the classical narrative cinema. While discussing the theory of film, Whittock draws our attention to the fact that cinematographic metaphor is the manifestation of consciousness and rationalism. He excludes the possibility of surrealistic or unconscious characteristics of filmic metaphors. Moreover, Whittock claims that the decoding process of the metaphor is a result of an analysis of given facts. Here we have to mention that while discussing the above-mentioned theory, the author does not include the background knowledge and emotional state of the decoder. Whittock reveals the tendency to avoid linguistic connections while discussing a filmic metaphor. Therefore, the following questions arise:

1. Can the metaphor be decoded avoiding its linguistic characteristics?
2. What is the tendency of the above-mentioned process in silent films?
3. What is the role of silent films in the development of a filmic metaphor?

Montage as a cinematographic tool was first used in the USSR. The perception process of the filmic metaphor consists of the following phases: 1. Superimposition; 2. Verbal image; 3. Montage; 4. Cinematography.

Superimposition is the process when one object replaces another so that both of them are visible for the audience. However, we have to mention that nowadays superimposition is considered to be an anomaly in cinematography. Superimposition unites two elements (belonging to two different categories) in the same space. Superimposition in silent films used to be done in the film camera and required huge professionalism of a photographer. However, the invention of optical printer made it possible to produce superimposition at laboratories. Consequently this type of metaphor started to disappear from films.

The verbal image, on the other hand, is based on linguistic, stylistic expressions i.e.: metaphor, cliché, proverb, etc. It was manifested visually and was frequently used in the USSR cinematography. Stylistic devices including metaphors frequently appeared in the following types of media: art samples, posters, puppet shows. Nevertheless, despite their frequent usage, members of society still lacked the educational background to decode them properly.

The montage was considered as a necessary tool to express the concept of a film more accurately. It included two different objects set in separated special conditions and resulted in parallel associations in the audience.

Thus it became obvious that cinematography lacked expressive features which hampered the effective perception process. As a result, the basic focus was made on the surface of an image and objects were generally set in the same mode. Consequently, montage started to create more realistic images in films.

This study investigates multimodal/filmic metaphors and their interpretation process in Georgian and American silent cinema. The examples brought from American and Georgian films (made during the Soviet regime in Georgia) are discussed.

2. Narration in the written text and in the film

Creative work consists of codes and signs. A written text includes lexis, syntax, punctuation, illustrations and written signs. A film, on the other hand, consists of illustrative signs, gestures, oral speech, music, and cultural codes taking into account the lifestyle, time and location of its contemporary society.

Instead of syntax and punctuation, the film employs pause represented through pictures or performances. While the written text includes signs, the film consists of codes. Here we have to mention that a story in the written text is retold by an author while the director visualizes it. A film shows a story that is in motion and based on words that appear in a particular text. The text, on the other hand, uses another method while delivering the meaning to the reader. However, the common characteristic of the written text and the film is that they both tend to retell a story.

The narration in film is significantly based on the plot. As words are the most difficult barriers concerning the transformation into the film narration, the basic aim of the director is to escape the influence of the authentic written text.

Ronald Barthes underlines the importance of the narrative function (Barthes, & Duisit, Lionel, 1975). The distributional and integrational functions of narration are also worth analyzing in order to examine the process of visual narration more accurately. More specifically, the distributional function in the film occurs when some units correspond to other units on the same level. The distributional function in a film, for instance, would be running after the umbrella as this correlates to the moment of catching it (Section 5, example 3, “Umbrella”). On the other hand, the integrational function correlates certain units to other units at a higher level. An example of an integrational function would be the demonstration of wings that creates an expectation in the narrative concerning the moment when the actors start to fly (Section 5, example 1, “The Kid”).

In addition, for Barthes, some narratives are extremely functional while others are basically indexical. More specifically, he claims that functional narratives in films are mostly based on the written text, while indexical narratives demonstrate some psychological factors, atmosphere, performance, etc. Films based on folk tales, for instance, are specifically functional whereas silent films are mostly indexical (Barthes, & Duisit, Lionel, 1975).

3. Metaphor in the film

Whittock takes a risk when he suggests turning a metaphor of the written text into a metonymy. It could lead to conceptual and perceptual disorder. Here it is worth differentiating the nature of a metonymy from a metaphor. Metonymy is the use of a term that has got close conceptual connection to the referred object. A metaphor, on the contrary, directly refers to an object or an

action to which it is not literally applicable. For further discussion, we can analyze a particular example of the research (Section 5, example 1, “The Kid”). The caption: “dreamland” appears at the beginning of the particular episode following the scene where actors find out that they have got wings. Here the words dreamland or wings do not necessarily mean a better place or Paradise. Quite on the contrary, dreamland and wings are the manifestations of the director’s ironic intention to emphasize the fact that paradise is hardly possible to exist on the Earth. Consequently, turning the given metaphor “dreamland” into a visual metonymy would lead an audience to misinterpretation as there is no connection to the literal meaning of the word and its particular concept.

The same tendency is revealed in structuralists’ frameworks although Whittock himself makes tries to dissociate himself from them (Whittock, 1990).

Whittock gives a wide definition of cinematographic metaphor and claims that it includes the following additional figures: comparison and hyperbole. Moreover, he puts emphasis on the fundamental principles of cinematographic metaphor and underlines the importance of creativity in language as well as in the film.

Recognizing the difference between film and language, Whittock suggests that film does not belong to the obvious grammatical category but rather includes its own regulations and combinations. Films demonstrate the combinations of moving images, sound, music, and language. In addition, the film includes several modes (visuals, spoken language, written language, sound, gesture, etc.), therefore we can define it as a multimodal medium. Due to the specific nature of the film, it mostly demonstrates multimodal metaphors (whose target and source are in different modes). What is more, the basic manifestation of a film as a sign system is its image that builds up portraits of audio-visual elements and shares the features of reflexive, real objects.

It is significantly important to take into consideration the internal (implied comparison) and external (interpretational) connections of a filmic metaphor during the decoding process. Here the audience plays a vitally important role. It must be ready to decode particular filmic metaphor correctly. The represented metaphor itself must be created in the manner to avoid some concept-related misunderstanding. In particular, the specific example of the research (Section 5, example 2, “Musicians”) is worth analyzing. In the given picture we can see that the performers are leaving the scene. More specifically, “Musicians” was Kobakhidze’s final work as an independent director. Therefore the internal significance of the filmic metaphor is to demonstrate the director’s intention to create a farewell scene for his audience. The audience, on the other hand, must have some

external (in this case: informative) readiness to interpret particular metaphor precisely. More specifically the audience must have some information about the director's biography so that to decode the given metaphor correctly.

Furthermore, an interesting metaphor can be considered to appear via the interaction of literary and figurative modes that are transformed into the cinematography and reflect the reality. It is important to note that inaccurate use of metaphors and destruction of the above-mentioned combinations lead to the incorrect decoding outcome.

4. Methodology

The study focuses on the examination of multimodal/filmic metaphors, their functions, and specific characteristics during the decoding process.

In his work: 'Non-verbal and multimodal metaphor in cognitivist framework' Forceville claims the following: 1. The theory of conceptual metaphor does not imply the existence of only the verbal metaphor; 2. Metaphor is more knowledge-based, therefore its major function cannot be based on verbal manifestations of a language only (Forceville, 2006).

According to the above-mentioned theory, Forceville claims that metaphor can exist not only in a language (as a verbal metaphor) but in any other creative work, art, gestures, and film as well. Some further studies concerning non-verbal metaphor approve the theory. While monomodal metaphor represents source domain and target in the same mode, multimodal metaphor refers to their various types of models. Forceville differentiates the following models: 1. Illustrative or visual model; 2. Oral or sound model; 3. Olfactory model; 4. Taste model; 5. Tactile model. The given models manifest the following 9 signs: 1. Illustrative signs; 2. Written signs; 3. Verbal signs; 4. Gestures; 5. Sounds; 6. Music; 7. Olfactory; 8. Tactile (Forceville, 2006; 2009).

Moreover, in order to analyse the image of a film, Whittock suggests using basic principles of filmic metaphors and provides the classification of their forms as follows:

1. **Precise comparison** (epiphany)- two elements (including their two similar characteristics) are juxtaposed to create a metaphor;
2. **Proved identity**- an object that reflects totally different object is called an anomaly;
3. **Replacement**- lost object is replaced with some external digestive expressions and examples;

4. **Diaphor-** diaphor demonstrates its contiguity in time and space and represents new type of connection between two objects that are not based on previous similarities or combinations. In order to give more precise interpretation of particular diaphor audience must be ready for a genre, style and the manner of performing;
5. **Metonymy-** metonymy vanishes particular aspects of objects and creates their existing or contextual connections to reality;
6. **Synecdoche-** similar to the metonymy, synecdoche appears in the combination of other tropes. It creates more difficult type of metaphor. Synecdoche is perceivable more than contextual;
7. **Object correlative-** object correlative occurs when particular object is associated with the characteristics of another object or given events. It is defined as a subtype of contextual metonymy;
8. **Anomaly** (hyperbole, caricature)- is deliberately created form of an anomaly with some further expectations;
9. **Replacement** – occurs after particular object replaces the expected element and has an impact on previous or existing connections in a film.
10. **Melody** (parallelism) - creates such unexpected or formal parallels as: rhyme, rhythm, grammar, etc. Sudden loud music, for instance, in Charlie Chaplin's film ("The Kid") is the demonstration of coming threat.

The examples of filmic and multimodal metaphors in the study are brought from Georgian and American silent films. Specific survey was done on social networking site such as Facebook to examine the interpretation process of multimodal-filmic metaphor more fundamentally. The aim of the survey was to discuss the interpretation process of multimodal/filmic metaphors in practice. Moreover, it would be interesting to examine the decoding process (of multimodal/filmic metaphor) of those people who are not linguists or philologists. The survey aimed to investigate the influence of emotional or educational background during metaphor decoding process. Consequently it was significantly important that some respondents were not influenced by their educational background. The questionnaire (including the examples from films analysed below) was used to collect the empirical data for the study. Overall 25 respondents participated in the survey (age: 20-35, 9 males, 16 females). Here we have to mention that only three of the respondents were philologists and

acknowledged metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon. The questionnaire included the following questions:

Question 1: What is your profession?

Question 2: What is your interpretation of „wings“ in episode 1?

Question 3: What type of person do you consider yourself - emotional or rational?

Question 4: What is your interpretation of the final scene of “Musicians”?

Question 5: Does the umbrella bring defensive emotions to you or can it be associated with the process of following one’s dream?

According to the results of the survey all of the respondents (25 altogether), 15 respondents considered themselves to be rational personalities whereas 10 respondents thought to be more emotional than rational. Moreover, all of the respondents interpreted wings as the symbol of an angel (example 1, The Kid). This could be explained with the fact that all of the respondents are from Christian countries. Moreover, the demonstrated wings are characterized by Christianity more.

According to the results of the survey all of the respondents, it turned out that 15 respondents considered themselves to be rational personalities whereas 10 respondents thought to be more emotional than rational people. Moreover, all of the respondents interpreted "wings" as the symbol of an angel (example 1, The Kid). This could be explained with the fact that all of the respondents are from Christian countries. Moreover, the demonstrated wings are characterized by Christianity more. Below the given examples make a clear difference between the appearance of Christian and Muslim angels. It is worth mentioning that only three of the respondents could decode the filmic metaphor (example 2, “Musicians”) precisely as they had some information about the director’s biography. In addition, rational respondents interpreted umbrella (example 3, “Umbrella) as a protective mechanism. On the contrary, umbrella was associated with the dream for those respondents who did not consider themselves as rational.

5. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study aim to underline the significance of the background knowledge, skill and emotional mood of the decoder during the interpretation process of filmic metaphor. It is also obvious that there is strong connection between filmic metaphor and its linguistic context.

For further analysis, cardinal and catalyst functions of a sign should be mentioned in order to investigate its transformation process from written text into a film. The cardinal function of a sign can be defined as the perception of meaning in a written text. Cardinal and catalyst functions can be transformed into a film as follows: the basic event of a written text could be changed in film i.e. happy ending instead of a dramatic one. Catalyst functions underline small events (i.e. a dinner could play the basic role in a plot) and give an important function to the written text.

Thus as cardinal and catalyst functions are not drastically connected to the written text, their linguistic-related audio-visual transformation is possible.

Although it is clear that a metaphor can be transformed from the written text into the film and thus become visual, in frequent cases we might face some misunderstandings during the decoding process. A question arises: is it possible to separate a filmic metaphor from its conceptual connection?

Example (1)



The given example provides some solutions to the above-mentioned question. The example is brought from the silent cinema film: “The Kid”. In the picture we can see the main character (acted by Charlie Chaplin) who wakes up in a kind of dreamland. The character finds out that people have become kind and they have got wings, just like angels. Here wings can be decoded as a multimodal visual metaphor of an angel. First of all, large, white wings are mostly associated with angels who live in Paradise. On the other hand, the audience can read a caption: “Dreamland” before the picture appears on the screen. The caption might be decoded as the Paradise (source domain). In addition, if we define the conceptual meaning of the word Paradise, we will agree that it is a better

place to live. We must still take into account the fact that the decoding process depends on the educational background and the belief of a decoder. Wings, on the other hand, are representation of the visual metaphor that functions as as a target domain. Therefore, in order to decode wings precisely in the given example, we should base ourselves on the biblical allusion. As well as this, successful decoding process of the filmic metaphor depends on the educational background, context, social register, age, etc. of a decoder. Moreover, the main plot of a film should be taken into account to decode a filmic metaphor precisely. In particular, the basic line of the film (“The Kid”) is the burlesque of the main character’s drama who is continually meeting his misfortune. In addition, it is worth mentioning that dreamland and paradise appear only in the dream of the main character. Therefore the director must have put an emphasis on the fact that perfect and totally peaceful reality does not exist. Thus without taking into account the main plot of a film, filmic metaphor could be misinterpreted. Therefore the interpretation process of given metaphors (dreamland, wings) embodies in the phases of conceptual connection of the caption (dreamland) to the visual picture (wings); their biblical allusions, taking into account the main plot of the film.

Another example is brought from the Georgian film: “Musicians” directed by Mikheil Kobakhidze.

Example (2)



The given picture demonstrates the finale of a film. At first glance, it appears as if the actors in the picture are just dancing or performing. In reality, the performers are leaving the scene to demonstrate the secret intention of the director.

Without knowing some information from the biography of the film director, it is hardly possible to decode the given example correctly. Mikheil Kobakhidze was an independent director and managed to express his own viewpoints through his films. The reason he chose silent cinema as a

genre could be hidden in its specific characteristics. Silent films provide limitless space and more opportunities to survive censorship. Nevertheless, Mikheil Kobakhidze could not survive the Soviet Union regime and he was forbidden to work as a director as his films were considered to be rebellious. Knowing that never again he would be able to work as an independent director, Mikheil Kobakhidze decided to create this farewell scene. Taking into account the brief description of this episode from the director's biography, it becomes easier to understand that the performers are leaving the scene, probably, forever.

In this case, without taking into consideration the background information about the director, it is hardly possible to decode the given filmic metaphor properly. Therefore, we should take into account the importance of the background knowledge of a decoder otherwise the proper interpretation process will fail. The above-mentioned example has shown that without particular background knowledge the filmic metaphor could be misunderstood or ignored by the audience. Thus, if we ignore the director's gesture, the general idea and intention of the film will be lost.

Importance of multimodal, filmic metaphors for Georgian directors and audience is worth mentioning as well. In order to survive the Soviet Union censorship, secretly hidden filmic metaphor was the only way left for directors of the period. That way they could express their opinions and establish or maintain some connection to the audience. Therefore we can claim that filmic metaphor serves a kind of bridge built between the Georgian society and directors and encouraged both parties to maintain their free spirit and cultural identity.

In addition, according to the findings of the study, we can claim that the decoding process of multimodal/filmic metaphor is based on the emotional background of a decoder.

In his work: "Theory of Attitude and Set and The Psychology of Set" (Uznadze, 1940) Dimitri Uznadze defines the attitude as an individual's condition of readiness to act in a particular way. The attitude is vastly triggered by an individual's demands. Attitude and emotion are the catalysts of creativity. Uznadze suggests that any type of behavior is a result of the previous mood. Emotion an universal, unconscious psychic mechanism. There is no coping mechanism to control it.

Example (3)



The following example is brought from the film “Umbrella” (director: Mikheil Kobakhidze).

A young couple (a man and a woman) start to run after an umbrella in an effort to catch it. This simple task turns out to be quite challenging. The survey employed in this study has shown that the given filmic metaphor (umbrella) can be decoded based on various interpretations. Taking into consideration the results of the survey we can claim that particular interpretation of the metaphor depends on the emotional background of a decoder. Particularly, the umbrella by rational decoders can be perceived as a protective mechanism as its basic function is to protect against rain or sunlight. Thus rational decoders’ interpretation is mostly influenced by their own experience as they are focused on the functional usage of the umbrella. On the contrary, the umbrella can be associated with the process of following the dream. Several respondents of the survey perceived umbrella as dream that is so hard to follow and make true.

Therefore, it is obvious that during the decoding process of multimodal and filmic (target domain and source domain in different modes) metaphors, rational decoders pay more attention to real facts, whereas emotional decoders rely on their own emotions and beliefs.

Therefore, without taking into account the emotional background of the decoder, the message will not be decoded properly (source domain will not be directed to target domain) that will result in miscommunication. Thus the finding of the study suggests that proper decoding process of multimodal/filmic metaphor is highly based on the emotional background of a decoder.

6. Conclusions

The study has discussed multimodal, filmic metaphors and their interpretation process in silent films. The basic aim of the investigation is to show the significance of the imagination, background and emotional knowledge of a decoder during the interpretation process of a filmic metaphor. The research discusses the connection between filmic metaphor and its linguistic context. In addition, conceptual significance of multimodal metaphor was investigated. Several examples were analysed (brought from Georgian and American films) in order to find out the usage and interpretation process of multimodal/filmic metaphors. Based on the findings of the research, we can claim the following:

1. The interpretation process of multimodal/filmic metaphor is based on the cultural, religious, educational, and emotional background of a decoder;
2. The interpretation process of multimodal/filmic metaphor is sometimes based on the emotional attitude of a decoder;
3. The interpretation process of filmic metaphor is based on the personality (rational, dreamer, imaginative, etc.) of a decoder;
4. Multimodal/filmic metaphor should be created and manifested in the manner and readiness of an audience must be taken into account;
5. Precise interpretation of multimodal/filmic metaphor will fail without the readiness of an audience;

The findings of the research have shown the importance of proper usage of multimodal/filmic metaphors and their precise interpretation so that the communication between a director and an audience to be successful.

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