

Synaesthesia, metaphor and conceptual blending

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Rhetoric represents an interesting field for the comprehension of the innovative potential of the cognitive paradigm, and the highlighting of the embodied nature of language and interconnections among experiential, neural, linguistic and cultural processes.

Within the reanalysis of the tangle of tropes, one of the most frequent question is that related to the specificity of figures of speech with respect to metaphoric and metonymic operations. In this paper, we propose some questions related to synaesthesia, whose complexity is due to the twofold phenomenology – linguistic and psychological – with which synaesthesia manifests itself as an apparent non-sense, an inter-sensory association (e.g., *cold call*; *profumo dolce* ‘sweet fragrance’).

Linguistic synaesthesia has been studied from different points of view, from rhetoric (Lausberg 1960) to pragmatics (Cinque 1972, Catricalà 2008), from psychology (Dogana 1990, Paissa 1995, Hubbard 2007, Cacciari 2008) to semiotics (Ullmann 1957, Williams 1976) and cognitive sociolinguistics, which has recently shown its importance for the survival of some expressions otherwise endangered (Berthele 2010). Many topics are debated, such as the definition of synaesthesia, the possible taxonomies, the directional (Shen & Gil 2007) and constructional (e.g., Noun-Adjective; Verb-Noun; Marotta in press) constraints. At the same time, several experimental results show the difference between: “concrete” and non-concrete synaesthesia (Catricalà 2009); “exocentric” and “endocentric” senses (Lakoff 1995, Catricalà in press).

The definition of synaesthesia is still problematic because inter-sensory can not always be represented as a mapping of correspondences between basic domains. Synaesthesia can, thus, be configured as a conceptual blending – the representation of a semantic structure which is, at least in part, emergent (input spaces do not include all the elements of such structure: Fauconnier & Turner 2001). Our analysis involves phenomena of lexicalization (data from dictionaries) and discourse configurations (corpora data) in two languages (Italian and English), with a focus on Noun Phrases.

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