ISSN 2181-3187

LINGUISTIC AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF BODY PART PERSONIFICATIONS

Mo'minova Malika Rashidovna
Independent researcher
gulsum.noserova.71@gmail.com

Abstract. Personification is a figure of speech in which non-living objects are given the characteristics, abilities, and nature of human beings. It involves describing innate objects and ideas having the ability to execute responsibilities that are only executable by human beings. Personification is a vital literary tool that is usually used as a technique in literary work. It also makes stories more interesting and appealing Taking examples from novels in a British National Corpus, this article aims to present a systematic investigation of the conceptual structures and communicative functions of body part personifications in discourse.

Key words. Personification, metaphor, conceptual structure, conventionality, deliberateness, fiction, metonymy

Introduction. The use of language that is varied, unique, and full of imagination is called language style. The language style is an interesting element in a literary work that captures the interest of readers and listeners. Every writer has a different style of expressing their writing ideas. The author will influence the creative style of each work applying different figurative language such as comparative figurative language, contradictory figurative language, satirical figurative language, and assertive figurative language. This study focuses on the personification and its conceptual analysis. Personification is a kind of figurative language or figure of speech that describes an inanimate object resembling a person's appearance. Personification is a style of language that places human behavior and applies it to inanimate objects in such a way that these inanimate objects have characteristics like living things. Personification can be used to compare living things to inanimate things in such a way as to appear alive.

Methodology. This article presents a systematic investigation of conceptual structures and communicative functions of personification by drawing on examples from fiction and employing different state-of-the-art methodologies. Steen [8] has pointed out that distinguishing between different levels of analysis 'has the advantage that the autonomy of the dimensions of metaphor in language and thought is acknowledged, and where long-term effects of metaphor may be perceived in linguistic and conceptual systems and their use' [8., p. 238]. Moreover, the communicative dimension can distinguish between metaphors that are deliberately used for a particular

ISSN 2181-3187

rhetorical goal and metaphors as a general tool in language and thought [8., p. 238]. The body part personifications are analysed on the basis of Steen's five-step procedure [9] to show how analysts can move from linguistic forms to underlying conceptual structures in a systematic and constrained fashion. All examples were taken from the fiction corpus annotated in the *Metaphor in Discourse* project at VU University Amsterdam. This corpus consists of 14 randomly selected excerpts from novels included in the BNC-Baby corpus, a 4-million-word sub corpus of the British National Corpus.

Results and Discussions. One type of personification that was frequently encountered in the fiction corpus concerns what can be called body-part personifications, involving a personification of parts of the human body. Body part is used here in the broadest sense, including such instances as 'voice' and 'breath'. These personifications are usually realized by verbs or adjectives, but can also be expressed by other word classes. It is important to note that in body-part personifications the body parts are part of the *target domain*. In other words, they are the entities being personified; these cases should not be confused with examples such as (1) and (2), in which the body parts are part of the *source domain* and can be used to personify other entities:

1. To his right the ground rose gently towards the southern cliffs and he could see the dark *mouth* of a concrete pillbox. [1]

2. There was a low table and three or four dainty chairs with aubergine velvet seats and gilded spindle *legs*. [1]

When it comes to body-part personifications, it can be observed that some are highly conventional, such as *come* in example (3), while others are more novel and more deliberately personifying, such as *play* and *hunt* in (4):

3. We were alone on deck, though not the only ones awake for I could hear Rickie and Ellen's voices *coming* from the open skylight of the main saloon. [1]

4. The voices *played* with the slaughter of the innocents, treble and descant *hunting* each other, while she bowed her head, unable to sing in tune. [1]

Additionally, these examples can be said to involve a metonymic relation between voices and people in line with Langacker's active-zone metonymies [4., p. 43). Though body parts are often used metonymically to stand for a specific character, metonymy is not a necessary condition in body-part personifications. Conventionality, metonymy and deliberateness are independent forces interacting in different ways, as illustrated by the following examples:

(5) Their tense, edgy faces *watched* Delaney closely. [1]

(6) They reached the main deck, dropping down in a defensive posture, eyes *searching* the stacked containers. [1]

ISSN 2181-3187

(7) His gaze *came back* to George, still sprawled over the control desk. [1]

(8) Paula's stomach *turned a somersault*. [1]

(9) Dimples *played* in his cheeks. [1]

(10) With Mrs Cranbrook's words Ruth's appetite immediately *returned*. [1]

While *faces* are used for *watching*, and *eyes* are used for *searching*, you do not use your *gaze* for *coming back*, your *stomach* for *turning a somersault*, your *dimples* for *playing* or your *appetite* for *returning*. This means that the first two examples score high on metonymy while the last four involve no metonymic reading. And while all the verbs in examples (5)–(10) have conventional non-human senses in the Macmillan dictionary, the addition of *somersault* to *turn* makes its use more creative and deliberate, causing it to have a stronger sense of personification. While all these examples concern verbs that essentially require a human agent, different interactions between conventionality, metonymy and deliberateness lead to different degrees of personification.

Similar to the verbs, these personifying adjectives differ in conventionality, influence of metonymy, and deliberateness. Structurally, they are similar to *thirsty soil* and *reproachful house*, but it is extremely difficult to find target-domain equivalents when the five step procedure [9] is applied. Nevertheless, these adjectives suggest a similar projection of agency and control to the previously discussed examples.

More deliberate and poetic examples of such personifications are discussed by Hamilton [3], who uses examples from Auden's poetry to show 'more than mere metonyms for a person, the body and the mind for Auden here are individual personified beings at odds with one another'. Although it may seem hard to conceptualize body parts as 'individual personified beings', this actually happens quite frequently in popular culture. For example, one of the main characters in *Lord of the Rings* is the disembodied, ever-watching Eye of Sauron, and *The Addams Family* would not be complete without their faithful servant Thing, a disembodied, conscious hand. Television commercials abound in body-part personifications, often involving our bodies telling us what is good or bad for us. Coca Cola created a series of commercials involving two eyes, a tongue, a nose and a brain bickering over the taste of Coca Cola Zero, Levi's had belly buttons singing 'I'm coming out!' and Nike launched a commercial involving a beer belly chasing a man down a street ('Belly's gonna get ya!').

When such examples involve metonymy, analysts may favour a purely metonymic interpretation and disregard such examples as personification. Yet scholars like Radden [6] and Goossens [2] have pointed out the possibilities for 'metaphor from metonymy', and Goossens discusses possible interactions between metaphor and metonymy in so-called metaphtonymies. One possible interaction described by

ISSN 2181-3187

Goossens [2] is *metaphor from metonymy*, which involves a metaphorical interpretation in which 'the conceptual link with the metonymic reading is still present' [2., p. 356]. Another possible interaction between metaphor and metonymy is *metonymy within metaphor*, involving metaphors with a 'built-in metonymy' [2., p. 363]. Goossens points out that his body part data contained a striking amount of metonymies, either purely metonymic or in some interaction with metaphor. He stresses that such cases exploit the 'double possibility' between metaphor from metonymy or metonymy only and that 'not infrequently both the metonymy reading and the metaphor-from-metonymy interpretation could fit a given context: it is typical of these items that in context their interpretation will sometimes have to remain "undecided"' [2., p. 357].

The body-part personifications from the fiction corpus can also be said to involve this 'double possibility'. Moreover, the personification mapping does not seem to occur between two distinct domains, or between arguments in two distinct domains, but rather between distinct arguments within one and the same domain. This process can be visualized as in Figure 1, for 'eyes searching the stacked containers' in example (6).

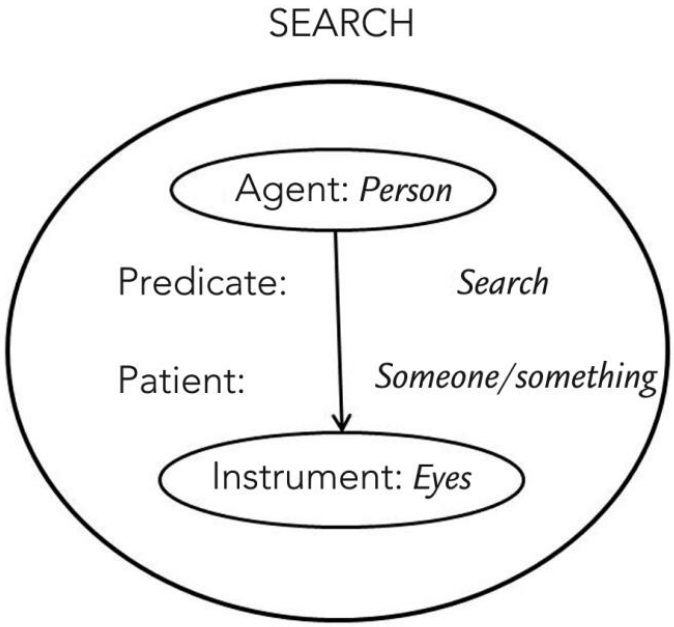

Figure 1. Personification based on a metaphor-metonymy interaction

Figure 1 shows that the metonymy and the personification metaphor are simultaneously present and this double possibility can be used to create particular stylistic effects: actions and qualities can be attributed to body parts as a way of making the narrative seem more immediate and creating a kind of zooming-in effect, similar to close-ups in films. Leech and Short [5] discuss how this is often done to create a specific mind style in fiction. They point out that the choice of a body part as subject

ISSN 2181-3187

instead of a character is ‘a fairly common device for suggesting that the part of the body involved acts of its own accord’ [5., p. 152], as actions can be presented as being performed by the character or by the body part, automatically or non-automatically, and with or without conscious effort.

Examples from the fiction corpus that illustrate this technique are the following:

(11) *None of them allowed their eyes to turn* towards the pine wood. [1]

(12) *Their minds had not reached out* to the terror of what had in fact happened. [1]

These examples represent relatively isolated cases, but the technique of assigning agency to body parts is used extensively in the novel *The Inheritors* by William Golding. Radden [6] points out that in this novel examples such as ‘Lok’s feet were clever. They saw.’ and ‘Lok’s ears spoke to Lok.’ play an important role in how the reader perceives the characters, since they ‘may be interpreted as being (almost) literally true for the people, who regard parts of the body as independent entities, but metaphorical for the reader’. Leech and Short [5] point out that expressions such as ‘listening face’ and ‘twinkling eyes’ are quite unremarkable in everyday discourse but they become significant when an author consistently uses this type of structure to ‘impart a particular flavour to the description’ [5., p. 156].

Conclusion. Since body-part personifications may play an important role in creating such descriptive flavours in fiction, they should not be excluded from the analysis of personifications in discourse. Though their linguistic and conceptual analysis as personifications may at times be tenuous, their communicative function as personifications via the projection of agency seems clear. Such body-part personifications are related to metonymy-based personifications as *This article explains* ... or *This theory claims* ... to avoid personal pronouns in academic writing, and *The government decided* ... or *The White House denies* ... to avoid assigning responsibility in journalism. The body-part personifications can be exploited to create a specific narrative point of view or stylistic effect in fiction and can be considered instances of personification, though perhaps not at all levels of analysis.

The relation between the linguistic forms and the conceptual structures of personification has not been discussed systematically, nor has the influence of conventionality, deliberateness and metonymy received much attention. Personifications that are so conventional and automatic that we hardly notice them should not be disregarded, and the fact that an expression may not be processed as a personification or give rise to a full conceptualization should not mean that the linguistic personification is ignored. Each level of analysis yields interesting results, and more research is needed to investigate how these levels interact, especially when

ISSN 2181-3187

it comes to the processing, understanding and appreciation of personification by language users.

References.

1. British National Corpus (BNC). http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/babyinfo.html
2. Goossens L (2002) Metaphtonomy: The interaction of metaphor and metonymy in expressions for linguistic action, in Dirven R and Pörings R (eds) *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 349–377.
3. Hamilton CA (2002) Mapping the mind and the body: On W.H. Auden's personifications, *Style* 36(3): 408–427.
4. Langacker RW (2009) *Investigations in Cognitive Grammar*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
5. Leech G and Short M (2007) *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2nd edn). Harlow: Pearson Education.
6. Radden G (2002) How metonymic are metaphors?, in Dirven R and Pörings R (eds) *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 407–434.
7. Steen GJ (2007) *Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage: A Methodological Analysis of Theory and Research*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
8. Steen GJ (2008) The paradox of metaphor: Why we need a three-dimensional model of metaphor, *Metaphor and Symbol* 23(4): 213–241.
9. Steen GJ (2009) From linguistic form to conceptual structure in five steps: Analyzing metaphor in poetry, in Brône G and Vandaele J (eds) *Cognitive poetics*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 197–226.