

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij, Elisabeth Piirainen  
**Figurative Language**

# Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs

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# Volume 350

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij, Elisabeth Piirainen

# Figurative Language

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Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives

2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised and updated

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# Preface

This book is the second edition of *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives*, which was first published in 2005. It appeared within the Elsevier series Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface. The book's popularity meant we needed to prepare a new edition. Since the Elsevier series had closed, we decided to publish the book with Mouton de Gruyter.

In the sixteen years between the first and second editions of this book, considerable changes in figurative language research made revision necessary. We updated the chapters in light of the latest research, and introduced new concepts. The theoretical part has been significantly revised and expanded, and now forms a greater proportion of the book. For example, Chapter 4, while retaining its title, has been significantly restructured and now includes completely new content. Major changes have also been made in chapters 1, 2, 6, 8 and 10.

In December 2017 Elisabeth Piirainen unexpectedly passed away, which made further revision extremely difficult. She collected invaluable empirical material, and I have largely tried to preserve it in this second edition.

What is this book about?

There are parts of the language system that cannot be analysed and described without addressing issues outside linguistics proper. The subject of our study belongs to this sphere. Any attempt to analyse figurative language by itself, without the inclusion of extralinguistic knowledge, is doomed to failure. The relevant differences between figurative units of language and their non-figurative near-synonyms can only be captured if we extend our data and methods and move into fields beyond linguistics in the narrower sense of the word. They cannot be exhaustively described or, more importantly, explained by means of purely linguistic methods. Instead, we have to address various types of extralinguistic knowledge, including knowledge that is culture-based.

The focus of our study is on conventional figurative units, i.e. not on novel metaphors, ad hoc metonymies, or various types of rhetorical figures, but on units such as idioms and lexicalised metaphors. The most important linguistic feature of these conventional figurative units is that they record and preserve relevant knowledge (as image traces) as part of their content plane, including, above all, reflections of the respective culture. The aim of this study is to develop a linguistic theory that is capable of taking this feature into account.

One of the most intriguing questions in the field of lexical analysis is the problem of the relationship between the figurative meaning of a lexical unit (idiom, proverb, one-word metaphor, etc.) and the mental image that forms its conceptual basis. For example, the word *web* denotes not only a spider's web but also a particular part of the Internet; the expression *a turn of the screw* stands

not only for a technical procedure, but also for intense pressure, constraint, or extortion.

A theory designed to analyse units of figurative language has to answer, at a minimum, the following questions: Are there any regular relationships between the literal, image-based reading fixed in the lexical structure of a given figurative unit and its lexicalised figurative meaning, i.e. its actual meaning? In other words, are such relations part of the more or less systematically organised structure of the lexicon? Can they be regarded as a relevant dimension of the structure of the lexicon, comparable to lexical relations such as synonymy and antonymy, or are they, rather, accidental and unable to be accounted for in terms of semantic regularities? Furthermore, if the relations between the literal and figurative meanings are systematic in nature, are they ruled by basic principles of human cognition, in which case they would have to be near-universals? Or do they vary from language to language to such an extent that it would not be reasonable to attempt to derive them from universal cognitive principles? What role does culture play in this domain? Is it possible to verify the assumption that some basic principles of human cognition are responsible for the creation of figurative units on the basis of literal units, and would such principles be modified by relevant cultural factors? Is the mental image underlying the actual meaning of a given conventional figurative expression only an “etymological” phenomenon, or is it (at least partly) a component of the content plane of the given expression? If it is the latter, what position in the semantic structure does the image component occupy? Does it have to be readily apparent in the meaning in the semantic representation of the given expression?

The general aim of our study is to develop a theoretical framework that makes it possible to analyse different types of conventional figurative expressions from different languages on a basis of consistent parameters and criteria, so that the potential findings will be fundamentally comparable. Such a framework will allow us to find at least tentative answers to some of the questions listed above. We refer to this theory as *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*. Accordingly, the proper subject of our study is *conventional figurative language*, i.e. a subsystem of the lexicon, as opposed to figurative ad hoc expressions produced in discourse.

We are convinced that an efficient discussion of this subject will only be possible if it is based on large-scale empirical work. Without a thorough analysis of hundreds of conventional figurative units from different languages, it would be futile even to try to discover relevant conceptual and semantic relationships in the domain of linguistic figurativeness.

We assume that figurative units differ from non-figurative units with respect to their semantic structure. A relevant element of the content plane of figurative

units is the so-called image component, a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure which triggers the corresponding mental image and the actual meaning of a figurative unit. One important consequence for a fine-grained linguistic analysis which follows from this assumption is that the traces of the literal meaning inherited by the figurative meaning have to be taken into account while describing the content plane of figurative units. This will help us not only to understand better the semantic and conceptual structuring of this part of the lexicon, but also to give an accurate lexicographic description of figurative units.

The conceptual nature of the image component can be roughly described as follows: mental images associated with figurative expressions are basically individual phenomena, but there are also intersubjective aspects to these mental images. The image component assumes the function of a semantic bridge between “what is said” and “what is meant”, i.e. between the lexical structure and the actual meaning.

In order to achieve our goal, it is crucial to uncover the types of knowledge that are involved in the creation of motivating links between the two conceptual levels of figurative units, i.e. between the underlying mental image and the actual meaning. Even at first glance, our empirical data from different languages suggest that many significant properties of figurative language can only be explained on the basis of specific conceptual structures that we generally refer to as *cultural knowledge*. Furthermore, we assume that many phenomena found in figurative language can only be properly described if we address cultural codes other than natural language (folk beliefs, customs, literature, the fine arts, etc.). An appropriate theoretical framework should provide explanations for cases like these.

In summary, we would like to discuss in this study an array of questions that arise in the domain of figurative language, from both a cross-linguistic and a cross-cultural perspective. Instead of suggesting a global theoretical idea serving as a foundation for the description of figurative phenomena, we attempt to find an appropriate theoretical framework for all the individual aspects of figurative language. In our opinion, no global and abstract theoretical approach can capture all the relevant facets of this phenomenon and the links it has with other conceptual, cultural, and linguistic domains. As a whole, our approach (labelled here the Conventional Figurative Language Theory) can be qualified as cognitive because it addresses different types of knowledge as an explanatory basis for linguistic phenomena. The general task of this theory is not to predict particular expressions, but to explain their meanings and functions in connection with other conceptual and semiotic phenomena.

This book is both practical and theoretical. It is based on a large amount of empirical data from various languages, and certain parts of it can be used as an

aid to the lexicographic description and contrastive analysis necessary for foreign language teaching. Theoretically, it offers a framework (including a metalanguage) within which units of figurative language can be effectively explored and explained.

Another crucial feature of conventional figurative language lies in the fact that a rigid application of the Saussurian distinction between synchrony and diachrony is of little value here. This is because many characteristics of the contextual behaviour of conventional figurative units can only be explained by means of their etymologies; that is, certain traces of original readings function as “etymological memories” and, as such, have an effect on synchronically observable linguistic behaviour.

This book presents a further development of these ideas and a synthesis of all our individual and joint work. It combines our quest for cognitive approaches to the phenomenon of idioms appropriate to better explain their special quality, our interest in language comparison and rich empirical data from different languages, and our interest in the semiotics of culture and the far-reaching cultural foundations of figurative language. Accordingly, the theory presented in this study is an attempt to develop a framework that makes it possible to integrate single observations and results and create a common explanatory basis for these individual phenomena.

The Conventional Figurative Language Theory is a set of principles which aims to answer questions such as

- What is the difference between *literal language* and *figurative language*?
- Are there any operational criteria for distinguishing between them?
- What are the specifics of *conventional figurative language* as compared to *non-conventional figurativeness*?
- Which kinds of lexical units belong to the field of *conventional figurativeness*?
- Are there any specific analytical instruments for investigating the crucial properties of conventional figurative units?

The intention of this second edition of our book is to discuss these questions and to provide clear and convincing answers.

Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij

Moscow, June 2021



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# 1 General issues

## 1.1 Working hypotheses

The present study is based on empirical data drawn from various languages (cf. 1.2). Numerous conventional figurative expressions are analysed in relation to their cultural background. While developing a number of theoretical ideas about the essence of figurative language, we let ourselves be guided by these empirical data, not by *a priori* models or conceptions.

Central to our study is the following idea: a specific conceptual structure underlies the meaning of a figurative unit. This conceptual structure contains traces of the image underlying the lexicalised meaning. These traces provide motivational links. These semantic elements constitute a special part of the content plane of a given figurative unit, based on mental imagery. We call this the *image component*.

The basic assumption of our study can be formulated as follows:

The image component, i.e. a specific conceptual structure linking the lexical structure and the actual meaning of a figurative unit, is an important element of its content plane.

We derive the following hypotheses from this assumption:

1. Many restrictions on the use of figurative units are due to specifics of their image components.
2. Semantic and/or pragmatic differences between figurative expressions with similar actual meanings often originate from specifics of the image component.
3. Near-equivalent figurative units in different languages are never identical with regard to their semantics and/or pragmatics if their image components reveal substantial differences.
4. Even if an image component does not directly influence the way in which a given figurative unit is used, it is still a potential part of its content plane, which can be activated in specific contexts such as plays on words.
5. Since the specific features of the image component are often historically grounded (i.e. the component preserves knowledge structures relevant at the time when the figurative unit originated), some elements of the user's etymological knowledge may influence the image component's semantic and/or pragmatic properties.
6. Since the specific features of the image component are often culturally grounded, the specifics of a given culture can influence linguistic structures in the field of conventional figurative language. Hence, different kinds of cultural phenomena can have linguistic relevance.

To test these hypotheses against empirical data from different languages and different cultures, various tools of analysis have to be developed, among them selection criteria, classifications and taxonomies of relevant phenomena, a metalanguage for their description and the like. These can be regarded as meta-linguistic components of the theory that we develop in this study. Elements of diachronic description must be included in the synchronic analysis if they help to capture the specifics of the image component.

All these ideas, assumptions and metalinguistic devices will be introduced, illustrated with rich empirical data, and discussed in detail in the following chapters.

## 1.2 Empirical data

The goals of this study are to investigate conventional figurative language. Although there are many innovative and/or ad hoc expressions which are strongly figurative, we are for the most part concerned with those conventional figurative units that are part of the lexical system of a given language. These figurative units are words or multiword expressions which are fixed, i.e. conventionalised. Accordingly, the empirical basis of this study consists of conventional expressions (idioms, proverbs, figurative collocations or one-word metaphors).

### 1.2.1 The languages analysed in the present study

Since our study is oriented not only towards cross-linguistic but also towards cross-cultural research, we had to select a range of languages that are (a priori) expected to reveal both linguistic and cultural differences. In selecting a suitable number of languages, we let ourselves be guided by the following oppositions: (i) standard literary languages vs. varieties without, or with only a late, written tradition, (ii) genetically and typologically affiliated languages vs. unrelated languages, and (iii) languages of more or less the same cultural area vs. languages of distant cultural areas. In addition to these oppositions, we took into account (iv) the differences between large and small linguistic (and cultural) communities (i.e. between widespread and lesser-used languages) and (v) the degree of geographical and cultural contacts of languages (geographically neighbouring vs. isolated languages).

Our empirical data were drawn from one dialect and ten standard languages and their respective cultural areas. We are fully aware of the fact that language communities and culture communities are almost never congruent (let alone the

fact that a nation is never congruent with one language and one cultural community). Almost nowhere in Europe can we find a speech community that is identical to a cultural community. An extreme case of cultural diversity of people speaking the same language is English. But even a small dialect is not totally congruent with the corresponding culture because its speakers normally use a different standard language and are involved in various cultural codes.

Five Germanic language varieties are considered here, namely four standard languages and one dialect. We analyse the West Germanic standard languages *English*, *German* and *Dutch*, the North Germanic standard language *Swedish*, and a *Low German dialect*. This dialect, called “Westmünsterländisch” (WML), is located in a small area of Germany at the edge of the German-speaking region near the Netherlands (see below for details).

All the five Germanic languages are genetically related by definition. In addition, some of them (German, Dutch and the WML dialect) are geographically connected. While English, German, Dutch and Swedish are written languages, used by large linguistic communities (with English being the greatest international language of communication), the WML dialect is regionally bound and used only in oral form in some mostly private and informal domains of a mainly agrarian society. So, the question is which value subsumes all the pairs? Is, for example, the geographical closeness more important than the opposition between written vs. oral? Or vice versa?

The other languages analysed in the present study are also standard or literary languages. Besides the Germanic group of languages, four other main groups of the Indo-European language family are represented: *French* as a Romance language, and – regionally and genetically less closely related to the above-mentioned languages – *Russian* (as a Slavonic language), *Lithuanian* (as a Baltic language) and *Modern Greek*. Lithuanian is a lesser-used language with a late written tradition, in contrast to the large Francophone and Russian linguistic communities and to Greek, all of which look back on long literary traditions.

Furthermore, two non-Indo-European languages have been included in the research, namely *Finnish* and *Japanese*. Both languages are agglutinative. Thus, they are, to a high degree, typologically different from the other languages. Nevertheless, Finnish has had much influence from Germanic languages. Swedish was the official language of Finland up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and linguistic contacts were natural in the bilingual regions of West Finland. What is more important, however, is that Finnish has shared the common European historical, religious, and cultural traditions and thus belongs to the same cultural area as the Indo-European languages named above.

Japanese has been chosen because it is not only geographically and linguistically very distant from the other languages but also represents an original culture,

one that is largely independent of influences from Euro-American cultural areas. Japanese ranks sixth in the world with more than 125 million speakers in Japan. Its genetic relation is still a topic of discussion. Japanese has a long written tradition, which goes back to the eighth century AD. Because of Japan's self-imposed isolation until 1853, it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Japan's culture met European culture. Thus, there had been virtually no contact between Japanese and Western languages and cultures before that time. Consequently, Japanese society can be observed over time as a relatively coherent cultural entity, at least in contrast to English or French speaking societies.

We hope that these languages will provide a reliable empirical basis for testing our hypotheses.

### 1.2.2 Sources used for the analysed languages

For the most part, the empirical data for the standard languages were drawn from dictionaries, text corpora, or other written sources. In several cases, our data were completed by survey results. As speakers of Russian, German and Finnish, we could also refer to our own linguistic competence for these languages.

The situation we were faced with when collecting material for the WML dialect was far different from compiling the conventional figurative units of the ten standard languages. Dictionaries, idiom collections, or text corpora did not exist. Instead, the empirical data originate from our own questionnaire survey. In the following passages, we will first outline in brief the situation of this dialect and the conditions of the data collection, before we go into detail about the sources used for the analysis of the standard languages.

**The Low German dialect “Westmünsterländisch”.** The dialect (located, as its name suggests, “west of the city of Münster”) belongs to the family of Westphalian dialects of North West Germany. It refers to a well-defined dialect area that is relatively easy to distinguish from adjoining Westphalian areas through a number of isoglosses (cf. Kremer 1993, 1996). The dialect was spoken until recently in a small region adjacent to the Netherlands. Whereas in former times a dialect continuum extended over both sides of the Dutch-German border, this border became increasingly fluid after World War II. Due to the border location, WML was preserved as an archaic dialect, used in some private domains of an agrarian community, almost exclusively in oral form. On the whole, these were favourable conditions for the study of this dialect.

Between 1986 and 1992, when there were still a sufficient number of competent speakers of this old basic dialect available, intensive field research was

carried out in the Westmünsterland region.<sup>1</sup> The dialectal idioms of WML were empirically collected with the help of numerous dialect experts of the older generation. Most of them had spent their childhood on farms and had acquired the dialect as their first language.

Two different types of methods were used to amass a vast amount of dialectal material: “indirect” methods (onomasiological and semasiological questionnaires) and “direct” methods (interviews, talk circles, participant observation). The topics addressed during this systematic collection of linguistic data are new for dialectology. They include, among other things, semantic classes such as APPEARANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN BEINGS, PEOPLE’S SUBJECTIVE VIEWS OF THE WORLD, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, EXPERIENCES, and HUMAN ACTIONS. More than 4,500 dialectal idioms were compiled through the field research methods mentioned above. The collected idioms were constantly checked for accuracy by many other native speakers. In addition, the remaining WML speakers were asked about their knowledge of idioms and the mental images evoked by specific figurative units. A database was developed to facilitate queries on the entire phraseology of WML; this facilitates fast access to all sorts of questions and data combinations.

***The standard languages.*** In what follows, we will enumerate the main sources used for compiling the conventional figurative units of the standard languages. Since the first edition of this book, several new idiom dictionaries have been published. In addition, there are now a number of online idiom dictionaries and text corpora available to verify our data. Nevertheless, the most important idiom dictionaries that we consulted should be mentioned here. For the sake of space, we cannot list all other (mono- and bilingual) dictionaries that we also referred to from time to time.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of publications available for the study of *English* conventional figurative units. The following idiom dictionaries were consulted frequently: Cowie, Mackin, and McCaig (1993), Ammer (1997), Longman ID (1998), Speake (1999), Gulland and Hinds-Howell (2001), McCarthy (2002). For American idioms we also referred to Makkai, Boatner, and Gates (1995) and Spears (1997, 1999). We mainly used Duden (2013) for *German*, and additionally Schemann (1989). *Dutch* idioms were looked up, for the most part, in Van Dale IW (1999), and in some

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<sup>1</sup> There are several studies on WML and its phraseology, see e.g. Piirainen (2000) for details.

<sup>2</sup> Several other publications, especially on proverbs, have also to be mentioned. The most important among them are Cox (1988), Mieder (1992), Paczolay (1994, 1997), Simpson (1992), and for Japanese proverbs Takashima (1981).

cases in Huizinga (1994). For *Swedish* we mostly referred to Schottmann (2012) and general dictionaries and asked native speakers.

The dictionary by Rey and Chantreau (2003) served as a basis for *French* conventional figurative units, supplemented by Pilard et al. (2012). With regard to *Russian* idioms, we made use of Lubensky's (2013) dictionary, the "Thesaurus of Modern Russian Idioms" (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2007), the "Academy Dictionary of Russian Phraseology" (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2020), the "Thesaurus of Russian Idioms: Semantic Groups and Contexts" (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2018), and the databases of "Modern Russian Idioms" (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Language Institute, Department of Experimental Lexicography, Moscow).

The situation with *Lithuanian* figurative units turned out to be more difficult. Besides the small phraseological dictionary by Galnaitytė, Pikčilingis, and Sivickienė (1989), there is the detailed but incomplete work by Grigas (2000, 2008). In addition, we had the "WordSmith Tools" database at our disposal. In many cases, we got valuable information from our respondents. We collected the bulk of our *Greek* empirical data from Antoniadou and Kaltsas (1994) and Brillouët and Kokkinidou-Maxime (2008). For special purposes (such as animal constituents), Chrissou (2000) and various general dictionaries were also consulted.

When selecting our *Finnish* examples, we sought advice from the publications of Kari (1993), Korhonen (2001, 2008), and Mauranen and Raudaskoski (2006). The following *Japanese* idiom dictionaries were consulted: Sasaki (1993), Maynard and Maynard (1993), Corwin (1994), Wallace and Kimiya (1994, 1995), Akiyama and Akiyama (1996), Garrison and Goshi (1996), Murakami (1997), Sanseido (2002), and Garrison et al. (2002). Several native speakers of Japanese also helped us with our data.

### 1.2.3 Languages analysed and the role of culture in figurative language

As outlined above, these languages were chosen in view of the oppositions (i–v) which enabled us to gain an insight into similarities and differences concerning the role of culture in conventional figurative language. Until now, much of idiom research has been concerned with standard literary languages, and thus almost exclusively with written forms of language, while minor languages with less developed literary traditions and dialects, in predominantly oral forms, have largely been ignored. However, the differences between standard languages and a basic dialect like WML, which has no written tradition, play a decisive role for figurative language.

Comparing figurative units of languages, literacy is a relevant parameter. WML speakers learnt to read and write Standard German only, and they never

read or wrote their dialect. Thus, the dialect did not undergo changes through writing, such as standardisation or borrowings from written texts. Although WML is located in Central Europe, figurative units of this dialect are little affected by phenomena due to “intertextuality”. There is no place for references to, for example, classical antiquity, or to the achievements of modern material and social culture as source concepts (e.g. technology, movies or sports). Instead, conventional figurative units of this dialect reveal their own cultural elements, rooted in the everyday experience of the rural dialect speaker community [cf. oppositions (i) and (v)]. Some peculiarities of Lithuanian (in comparison with the other European languages) might also be ascribed to the late development of the written language and literary tradition.

In contrast to the WML dialect, the nine standard European languages (English, German, Dutch, Swedish, French, Russian, Lithuanian, Greek and Finnish) are quite close to each other with regard to their conventional figurative expressions. It is a well-known fact that the languages of Europe show far-reaching similarities in the figurative lexicon. In fact, the term *widespread idiom* (WI for short) was recently introduced into linguistics. This refers to idioms that occur in a large number of languages and have almost identical lexical and semantic structures.<sup>3</sup> There are several WIs among the data of the present book.

Similar discoveries come from typology research. Fairly recently, linguists have recognised that there are great syntactic, morphological and semantic similarities between the languages of Europe; these similarities are called *Euroversals*. The languages of Europe are seen as a particular group with a remarkable uniformity, especially in contrast to non-European languages. Initially, the term *European Sprachbund* (“linguistic area”) was used for this discovery; later the term *Standard Average European* (SAE for short) gained more acceptance. Up to now, the term has been used for mainly structural convergences that cannot be explained by genetic relationships.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> To date, about 500 idioms have been identified using intensive research (cf. Piirainen 2012, 2016). Earlier terms such as *Europeanisms* or *internationalisms* are considered unsuitable for the phenomenon of widespread use of figurative units.

<sup>4</sup> Whorf ([1941] 1956) coined the term SAE when he compared structures of Native American languages with European languages. The term met with criticism much later because of ideological, hegemonic connotations. Whorf used it, among other things, to describe a way of thinking of Europeans as opposed to that of the Hopi people, and not primarily as a term for common grammatical properties. Typology research, on the other hand, embraced this term, and it became generally established through the project “Typology of Languages in Europe” (EUROTYP), where it is used in the sense of the term *European Sprachbund* or *European linguistic area* (e.g. Dahl 1990, 2001; van der Auwera 1998; König and Haspelmath 1999; Haspelmath and König 2001).

Explanations of how these typological “Euroversals” came into being have much in common with the evaluation of the “widespread idioms” in conventional figurative language. Both phenomena are attributed to far-reaching common historical, religious, and cultural traditions, from Greek antiquity, medieval Latin literature, the Renaissance and Humanism, when Latin was the scholarly *lingua franca*, to many other cultural contacts in Europe over the centuries. The European standard languages tend to grow closer together as far as their imagery in figurative language is concerned. This is paralleled by the extent to which modern urban societies converge culturally. Moreover, as the analysis of Finnish figurative units shows, genetic affiliation or linguistic typology is of no importance to conventional figurative language [cf. oppositions (ii), (iii) and (iv)].<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Japanese, an East Asian language, is particularly well suited for researching the role of culture in figurative language. Japanese, once completely isolated from Western cultural influences, serves as a contrast to the increasingly unified Euro-American languages. Japanese figurative language reveals its own original cultural components, rooted in the very different cultural traditions of Japan [oppositions (iii) and (v)].

In sum, Japanese as well as the Low German WML dialect turn out to be the most distant from all standard European languages and most likely to reveal idiosyncratic factors as far as their figurative foundations are concerned. With regard to their conventional figurative units, the uniformity of the European languages stands directly opposed to the idiosyncratic factors discovered in the WML dialect and in Japanese. This is grounded in various cultural aspects underlying the imagery of figurative units. In order to compare figurative phenomena across a great variety of languages and dialects, a typology of aspects of culture in figurative language will be suggested (see chapter 10).

#### 1.2.4 Arrangement of the linguistic data and typographical conventions

The insufficiencies of idiom dictionaries, above all with regard to the semantic description of conventional figurative units, are well known (cf. Burger 1992; Dobrovolskij 2015). Nevertheless, for several foreign languages in this study we have to rely on information given in dictionaries. Thus, the semantic paraphrases of some individual figurative units can only be approximations of their actual

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<sup>5</sup> Similar results come from Arabic languages (Owens 1996). Structurally, Nigerian Arabic is a variant of Arabic, but idiomatically it belongs to what is termed a Chad basin idiomatic type, which includes languages of different genetic affiliation.



semantic potential and should not be regarded as adequate meaning definitions. For figurative units of our native languages, however, we will use a linguistically tenable metalanguage.

We used the following typing conventions: Linguistic units are given in italics, literal translations are enclosed in double quotation marks, and actual meanings are enclosed in single quotation marks. The underlying concepts appear in small capitals. In some cases, words have been added in the literal translations of linguistic units in order to facilitate comprehension; these additional words are given in round brackets. Grammatical explanations as well as additional, more readable translations are given in square brackets. Verbal idioms are normally given in the infinitive form, except where pragmatic or syntactic reasons render a citation form in the infinitive impossible. According to the custom, we cite Greek verbal idioms in the first person singular. For the Japanese linguistic units, we use the original writing and the Hepburn Romanisation in brackets. Chinese items are given in the Pinyin transcription.

## 1.3 Criteria for figurativeness

### 1.3.1 Literal – non-literal – figurative

Many studies on figurative language, especially on metaphors, start with historical remarks on the ancient Greek philosophers, above all on Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> Most authors regard Aristotle as the first to outline a theory of metaphor and as responsible for initiating a Western tradition that treats metaphors not only in terms of similarity but also in terms of deviation from literal language. Thus, on the one hand, “hardly a single twentieth-century study of metaphor passes over Aristotle in silence” (Leezenberg 2001: 31). On the other hand, recent studies draw attention to problematic misunderstandings of Aristotle in present-day research. Lloyd (2003: 101) points out that “[o]ur notions of metaphor have a history, one that ultimately goes back to the Greeks. It is well known that *μεταφορά*, transfer, is far from being an exact equivalent to our ‘metaphor’.”

We will not go deeper into the various concepts of *metaphor* in the history of philosophy and linguistics here, nor into the extensive discussions on this matter in present-day linguistics. However, we need to take a critical look at some notions

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<sup>6</sup> Various researchers mention classic Greek philosophers in the context of research on figurative language (e.g. Black 1955; Johnson 1981, 1987; Ortony 1993; Ross 1993; Gibbs 1994: 121–122; Katz 1998: 20–22).

of *metaphor* in order to delineate our concept of figurative language. The central question is how the subject of our study, “figurative language”, can be defined, and how it can be contrasted with other types of “non-figurative language”. It is only from this angle that we approach metaphors.

There is a long tradition in linguistics concerning semantic change and the question of how novel expressions come into being through “similarity” or “analogy”, i.e. via metaphors. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Neogrammarians published profound studies on this subject. Many of their examples have been taken up by later studies on metaphors. In his “Principles of Language History” from 1880, Hermann Paul deals with different cases where the “new” (occasional) meaning of a lexical unit becomes “usual” (conventional, lexicalised) and begins to lose its metaphorical character (Paul [1880] 1920: 94–96). For the most part, the lexicalisation of the “new” meaning is preceded by a period of polysemy (with the original and the new meaning used side by side).

There are examples where a former metaphor cannot be recognised except through the etymology (e.g. German *Rappe* ‘black horse’, metaphorically derived from *Rabe* ‘raven (black bird)’). In other cases, the metaphor is easier to comprehend, as in units like *neck of a bottle*, *leg of a chair*, *foot of a mountain*. The analogy between spatial and temporal extensions also belongs to this group, manifesting itself in large portions of the lexicon, cf. German *die Zeit kommt, vergeht* “the time comes, goes by”, or prepositions like German *in, an, zu, bis, durch, über*, etc. In addition, Neogrammarians have thoroughly described orientational metaphors connected with ‘quantity’, ‘morality’, etc. (e.g. German *die Preise steigen*, “the prices are rising”, *er steigt in meiner Achtung* “he rises in my respect”) or “CONTAINER metaphors” with MIND, HEART, as well as other well-known metaphors (later labelled “conceptual metaphors”) such as UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING (cf. Paul 1920: 96).

All these examples have been discussed continually in subsequent studies on metaphor. Compare the discussions on “metaphoric” prepositions by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987b), or on spatial motion verbs in “metaphoric” temporal use (*winter comes*)<sup>7</sup> or other conceptual metaphors. In many studies, these cases are labelled “dead metaphors”, “frozen metaphors” or “conventional metaphors”. Let us look at an example:

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7 There is a rich literature on spatio-temporal relations in language (cf. Traugott 1978; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Boroditsky 2000, 2001; Radden 2003; Núñez, Motz, and Teuscher 2006; Casasanto and Boroditsky 2008; Evans 2013; Dancygier and Sweetser 2014: 168–177; Moore 2014; Athanasopoulos, Samuel, and Bylund 2017; Pamies-Bertrán and Yuan 2020 among others).

Poetic language is often considered to be a likely context for innovative metaphors, so let us consider first the following quotation from Shelley:

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Here we can recognize *comes* as a conventional metaphor exemplifying a peripheral meaning of the core spatial term designating motion. *Behind*, however, is higher on the reference scale, i.e. is more strongly metaphorical, since it is less conventional.

(Traugott 1985: 33)

Metaphoricity is a matter of degree: *Winter comes* is a conventional metaphor, whereas *can Spring be far behind* is less conventional and more poetic. What Traugott calls “conventional” is labelled “non-literal, but not figurative” in our study.

The question that is relevant to the present study is whether or not we are dealing with figurative lexical units. As will be explained below, we regard dead or frozen metaphors (like *Rappe, neck of a bottle, in winter or the taxes are high*) as non-figurative. Therefore, these lexical units do not fall into the scope of our study. In order to differentiate the subject of our study from the “conventional metaphors” discussed above, we use the term *conventional figurative metaphor*.

To define “figurative language”, we need to find criteria for the differentiation between “figurativeness” and the various kinds of “non-figurativeness”. Let us first consider the well-known distinction between the *literal*, *non-literal* (but *non-figurative*) and *figurative* use of lexical units. Dirven (2002: 337–339) illustrates this trichotomy by the adjective *sweet* in *sweet apple* (literal use), *sweet water* ‘non-salty water’ (non-literal but non-figurative use) and *sweet child* (figurative use). Dirven points out that there are degrees in figurativeness, so that one can distinguish between low and high figurativeness (or “figurativity” in Dirven’s terms).

Dirven analyses three main cognitive strategies to create non-literal and figurative meanings: *synaesthesia*, *metonymy* and *metaphor*. With regard to parts of speech, it is more or less predictable that synaesthesia will occur especially with adjectives and metonymy with nouns, while metaphor occurs with all parts of speech.

According to Dirven (2002: 339–340), metonymy, just like synaesthesia, may lead to non-literal extensions that are non-figurative. He exemplifies this with the word *heart*, literally meaning ‘the central blood-pumping organ in the animal or human body’. All the expressions with *heart* in the sense of ‘seat of emotions, mind, memory, etc.’ or ‘mental faculties’ (e.g. *from the bottom of my heart; to know by heart*) are considered non-literal but at the same time non-figurative. The reason for the “non-figurativeness” of these expressions is that the heart was once

believed to be the seat (the real location) of life, mind, memory, etc. (which is now in Western cultures more commonly attributed to the brain).<sup>8</sup> In Dirven's opinion, the figurative use of the word begins when *heart* comes to stand for single emotions (e.g. *My heart sank into my shoes*, where *heart* stands for 'courage'). Dirven (2002: 341) sums it up as follows:

The figurative use of language in its various manifestations is then but a consequence of simultaneous mental operations of the sensory organs in synaesthesia, contiguity in metonymy, and similarity in metaphor. In all of these, the tension between one element and the other is built upon a different interaction of likeness and difference, of similarity and contrast. The greater the contrast between the two elements, the greater also the degree of figurativity, or in its higher realisation, the higher the degree of metaphoricity.

The extent of the conceptual contrast between literal and non-literal reading is decisive: if this contrast is minimal, the non-literal use is not perceived as figurative. Furthermore, in cases where the categorical shift is not evident synchronically, and especially if the speaker has no other way to denote the concept in question than to use an expression that is historically a metaphor, we are dealing with non-literal but not figurative expressions. Another question arising in this connection is whether it is useful to refer to such linguistic expressions as metaphors (cf. e.g. Stern 2000: 176).

We use the term *figurative* for a wide range of linguistic phenomena, including both conventional and ad hoc expressions. In this regard, our understanding of figurativeness differs from the interpretation by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Using the example of the conceptual metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 52–53) point to the difference between conventional expressions like *construct a theory* or *foundation of a theory*, on the one hand, and novel metaphors such as *His theory has thousands of little rooms and long, winding corridors*.<sup>9</sup> The authors describe the former as based on the “used part” of the conceptual metaphor and, therefore, “normal” and “literal”, whereas the latter is viewed as based on the “unused part” of the conceptual metaphor and, hence, “figurative”: “These sentences fall outside the domain of normal literal language and are

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<sup>8</sup> Here is not the place to discuss the semiotisations of HEART which have often changed. Nevertheless, there is extensive literature on this subject (cf. Foolen 2008; Geeraerts and Gevaert 2008 among others).

<sup>9</sup> Since the publication of the first edition of this book, several studies have emerged dealing in particular with the difference between *conventional* metaphors and *novel* metaphors. Cf. also the notions of *linguistic* metaphors, that is, those that exist in language, and *dynamic* metaphors (Hanks 2007), or the opposition of deliberate and non-deliberate metaphor (Steen 2008). See also the discussion of this issue in Gibbs (2011, 2015) and Steen (2015).

part of what is usually called ‘figurative’ or ‘imaginative’ language”. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 53). Although Lakoff and Johnson’s argumentation is convincing, and distinguishing between used and unused parts of a conceptual metaphor makes a lot of sense, we still do not agree with the authors’ interpretation of figurativeness. From our point of view, many conventional metaphors are figurative units even if they do not fall outside the used parts of the metaphoric model in question. What is crucial is whether they possess (more or less) clearly perceivable image components and whether they are additional names (for more details, see sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3). Thus, examples like *construct a theory* or *foundation of a theory* are really not figurative, but this is not because they are based upon the used part of the conceptual metaphor. They are perceived as literal expressions because nobody would interpret the words *construct* and *foundation* in the given combinations as entities from the BUILDING domain. These links are not part of the shared knowledge of the speech community. In the course of history, the words *construct* and *foundation* have developed abstract senses, which allow us to understand them without addressing images of building or construction. Therefore, they can hardly even be considered non-literal, let alone figurative. There are, however, many other metaphors based on the “used parts” that are still figurative in our sense, i.e. having a relevant image component in their semantic structure.

In order to define the subject of our investigation, we have to distinguish between figurative language and phenomena that are related but not identical. To be able to do so, we need some heuristic criteria for at least approximately identifying figurative units of language. We are aware of the fact that other interpretations of the phenomenon of figurative language are possible (cf. e.g. Bergen 2007); the interpretation we favour here is influenced by our purposes and our data. We put forward two heuristic criteria for distinguishing between figurative and non-figurative units. We call them

- Image requirement
- Additional naming

Let us discuss these two criteria.

### 1.3.2 Image requirement

The criterion of *image requirement* is conceptual in nature and can be operationalised by taking into account contextual properties. Let us introduce the term *image component*. By *image component* we understand a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure which triggers the corresponding mental

image and the actual meaning<sup>10</sup> of figurative units. Hence, the content plane of a figurative unit not only consists of a pure “meaning”, i.e. actual sense denoting an entity in the world, but also includes traces of the literal reading underlying the actual meaning. This distinguishes figurative units from non-figurative ones. Figurative units possess a second conceptual level at which they are associated with the sense denoted by their literal form.

The conceptual nature of the image component can be roughly described as follows: mental images associated with figurative expressions are basically individual phenomena, but there are also intersubjective aspects to these mental images. The image component assumes the function of a semantic bridge between “what is said” and “what is meant”, i.e. between the lexical structure and the actual meaning.

From this heuristic stance, additional questions arise, and we will address some of these: Is the image component predominantly a semantic or a pragmatic phenomenon? Does it influence the actual usage of figurative expressions? Can the image component always be explained in terms of metaphorical mapping, or can it also be based on other semiotic phenomena? Are there significant cross-linguistic differences in the choice of image basis for figurative expressions, i.e. in the way in which certain concepts are linguistically fixed in figurative expressions? If so, how can they be explained? Are they due to coincidence, to different principles according to which certain domains of experience are structured, or to cultural phenomena? In other words, are the relevant cross-linguistic differences (if any) a matter of the specifics of the languages in question, or are they due to conceptual and/or cultural specifics behind the linguistic structures?

As the most salient feature of figurative language is its image component, the traces of the literal meaning inherited by the figurative meaning have to be taken into account, cf. (1).

- (1) *(to be caught) between a rock and a hard place*  
 ‘(to be) in a very difficult position; facing a hard decision’ (Spears 1997: 15)

The explanation of the meaning given here is not sufficient because it neither involves the images connected with the individual constituents nor the metaphor as a whole. The constituent *rock*, as well as *hard place*, evokes an image of something very solid, heavy, and immovable that hurts when one attempts to move it. The underlying literal reading (i.e. the source concept), on the other hand,

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<sup>10</sup> The term *actual meaning* is ambiguous and is used also in the sense of contextual or situational meaning. We use the term in the sense of ‘lexicalised figurative meaning’.

is to be described as ‘lack of freedom of movement’. When mapped on the target concept ‘difficult position’, idiom (1) appears as a realisation of the well-known conceptual metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION (Lakoff 1993: 20).

The presence of such an image component in the actual, i.e. figurative, meaning of the idiom seems to be psychologically real because of relevant usage restrictions. Thus, the speaker perceives the difference between *to be in a very difficult position* and *to be between a rock and a hard place* due to the mental images evoked by the literal interpretation. Consider the following example.

- (2) *When he had to submit the article by Friday and did not get the material in time he was in a very difficult position.*

In (2) it is not possible to replace *to be in a very difficult position* by *to be between a rock and a hard place* because the context does not involve the mental image of being between two obstacles, i.e. the idea of a ‘lack of freedom of movement’. The concrete image fixed in the lexical structure of (1) presupposes that the subject finds himself/herself in a situation where he/she has to choose between two possibilities which both entail difficulties and failure. Therefore, idiom (1) should be defined as (3).

- (3) ‘facing a situation of choice between two possibilities that both entail difficulties and failure, as if the person pursuing his/her goals is not able to move away freely’.

This definition seems to be more appropriate not only than the definition given in (1) but also than the following definitions (4) taken from other idiom dictionaries, which are more elaborate than (1).

- (4) ‘in a difficult situation in which any choice that you make will have bad results’ (Longman ID 1998: 286)  
 ‘in a situation where one is faced with two equally difficult or unpleasant alternatives’ (Speake 1999: 297)  
 ‘nothing to choose between two difficult situations’ (Gulland and Hinds-Howell 2001: 17)  
 ‘you have to make a difficult decision between two things that are equally unpleasant’ (McCarthy 2002: 327)

Although (4) points to the fact that an important part of the meaning of this idiom is the existence of a choice between different ways to manage a situation, it does not take the image component itself into account, which provides relevant links between the lexical form of the idiom and its actual meaning.

To find out whether or not the plane of content contains an image component, we can carry out a kind of contextual substitution test. If some special semantic effects, which are entailments of the image component, can be found, the expression in question will qualify as figurative. The use of figurative expressions is also connected with special pragmatic effects (such as intended expressivity), which can result from their imagery. Checking for semantic and pragmatic effects can be applied as an operational criterion for figurativeness. Let us once more consider the meaning definition in (3) ‘facing a situation of choice between two possibilities which both entail difficulties and failure, as if the person pursuing his/her goals is not able to move away freely’. The part of the definition starting with *as if* is responsible for the image component, which is crucial for distinguishing between the meaning of this idiom and the meaning of the near-equivalent word combination *in a very difficult position*.

The presence of the idea of choice between two possibilities, both of which are perceived as disadvantageous for the subject, as well as the image-based reference to a ‘lack of freedom of movement’, can be exemplified by the following contexts taken from the British National Corpus (5–7):

- (5) She wanted to scream the words back at him, but they log-jammed in her throat. To reveal the truth would be to render herself still more vulnerable to him, and she couldn’t allow that to happen. But the alternative – to have him believing her poor showing had been caused by drugs – was equally untenable. She was *caught between a rock and a hard place* – with no obvious way out.
- (6) “[. . .] If you produce the right designs I’ll use them. And be only too happy to give you full credit.” He paused. “But, if you fail, I’ll show no mercy. You can absolutely bank on that.” That scarcely needed saying. Lisa felt a chill go through her. Suddenly she was *caught between a rock and a hard place*. “So, I would advise you”, he added, nodding at her folder, “to make a bonfire with those sketches and start again from scratch.”
- (7) “[. . .] But if this is what love does to you, it’s perhaps just as well you’ve never suffered from the malady before.” Rory shook her head, sending her long wheat-coloured curls tumbling about her face. “Don’t be ridiculous”, she said adamantly, then bit her lip. She was *caught between a rock and a hard place* here, she realised with grim humour. Since Adam had been monopolising practically all her time, she couldn’t protest her dislike of him too vehemently. Candy would pounce on that like a terrier, demanding to know why she didn’t just tell him to get lost. But she’d given her promise, albeit with great reluctance, not to confide the truth to her friend.



Semantic and pragmatic effects of this kind may find expression in the form of combinatorial restrictions on the lexical unit in question (which is the case in these examples). Thus, if in certain contexts the image component, even as a peripheral part of the semantic structure, can be responsible for combinatorial restrictions, there is linguistic evidence for its relevance. In such cases the criterion of *image requirement* can be regarded as an important operational criterion because the relevant traces of a given image are obvious. We will deal with this phenomenon in more detail in section 8.2.

Another way of proving the existence of an image component is to look for contexts containing plays on words, as for example (8) and (9):

- (8) She's an angel . . . always *up in the air* and *harping on things*.
- (9) Customer: "Waitress, why is my doughnut all smashed?" – Waitress: "You said you wanted a cup of coffee and a doughnut, *and step on it*."

The literal readings of *up in the air* and *harping (on something)* in (8) evoke images that can be connected with the concept of an angel. The word play lies in the fact that the figurative meanings ('to be furious, angry' and 'to speak about something time and time again, to moan, complain about something', respectively) are activated simultaneously so that the expression is semantically ambiguous. The joke (9) makes use of the same pattern: *Step on it!* is a colloquial expression meaning 'Hurry up, move it, make it snappy!' The image component from car driving (to put one's foot down onto the accelerator pedal) is taken literally in the word combination *and step on it* (i.e. on the doughnut). Plays on words prove that it is always possible to make us aware of image components. Word play is only possible when the lexical unit in question has an additional meaning component that can be activated in this way.

Of course, not every play on words is based on the actualisation of the image. Compare slogans like *Sea-ing is believing* (based on homophony of *sea* and *see* in an advertisement for boat trips) or *The only thing we overlook is our river* (based on the homonymy of the verb *overlook*,<sup>11</sup> advertising a hotel on the Mississippi). Thus, this test is irreversible: it can be used to prove the existence of the image component, but it does not mean that every word that is used in two different senses in the context of a word play is figurative.

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<sup>11</sup> Dictionaries often treat this kind of homonymy as polysemy, which is, from a linguistic viewpoint, inaccurate, because there is no nontrivial common semantic component for the two senses 'ignore' and 'have a view of'.

We can say that word play contexts are exceptions, but even the rare possibility of realising a certain semantic component as the central one proves that this meaning component is latently present. In principle, therefore, contexts of this type can be used as operational tests for proving the linguistic relevance of the image component, especially in cases in which there are no combinational constraints due to the image.

The essence of the image requirement criterion is the synchronically identifiable ability of a linguistic unit to denote its referent not directly but via another concept. A unit of figurative language differs from a literal unit, first of all, through this ability to combine two different conceptual levels in its semantic structure. In semiotic terms, a unit of figurative language is not just a linguistic sign having form and content and denoting something outside itself. It is a sign that uses the content of another sign as a form filled with new content (called an *inner form* in the Russian linguistic tradition following Potebnja), so that additional associations arising from interaction between the two signifieds of the one signifier come into existence. Thus, a figurative unit can be considered a secondary sign.

Let us briefly discuss the specifics of the image component among similar notions that have been developed within the linguistic theories of lexical semantics, especially within the conceptions having to do with processing figurative units of language (for more details, see Dobrovol'skij 2016b). In addition to the image component, three basic notions that provide our theoretical foundation are

- *inner form*,
- *mental image* and
- *etymological memory*.

The term *inner form* (*внутренняя форма*) in the sense discussed here was coined by the well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian philologist and philosopher of language, Potebnja (1892). This term initially goes back to Humboldt, who introduced the notion of the *inner form of language* (*innere Sprachform*), and understood it in a completely different sense, as referring to something like “national spirit” reflected in a language, i.e. the specific ways of conceptualising reality characteristic of every language community (cf. Humboldt [1836] 1979).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “In Russian thought, with its marked interest in *logos*, many philosophers and linguists were interested in inner form (Aleksij Losev, Pavel Florenskij, Sergei Bulgakov, and Aleksandr Potebnja). However, the concept begins a new life thanks to Shpet’s interpretation of Humboldt and his own original perspective on inner form that combines Western and Russian approaches to the question seen through the prism of hermeneutical logic” (Lyanda-Geller 2018: 61). Lyanda-Geller (2018: 73) points out that “for Gustav Shpet inner form is a locus of sense [. . .]. Inner form as a logical form has inspired developing new ideas in various fields of Russian and

Potebnja speaks of the *inner form of a word* (*внутренняя форма слова*) and defines it as the relationship of the thought's content to consciousness («отношение содержания мысли к сознанию»). The inner form shows the way in which people reflect their thoughts (Potebnja 1892: 102). Potebnja connected the inner form of the word both with its etymology and with the psychological side of its motivation.

Typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century philological studies, Potebnja's definition is rather vague and difficult to operationalise. Nevertheless, the notion of the inner form has become an important research instrument in Russian linguistics. Compare e.g. Zaliznjak (2013: 41–50).

It might seem that the term *inner form* is justified only as part of the Russian linguistic tradition and can easily be replaced by such terms as *source domain*, *source frame*, *mental image*, *background categorisation* (cf. *фоновая категоризация* in Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2008), at least in figurative language research in Frame Semantics or Cognitive Linguistics. But this is not quite true, for the meanings of all these terms are not completely identical.

In terms of present-day linguistics, the inner form of a lexical unit (word or idiom) can be defined as a kind of semantic paradigmatic relation between the target lexeme and the meanings associated with its constituent parts and/or the underlying mental image.

Generally, the term *mental image* is a near-synonym of the *inner form*. The difference between *inner form* and *mental image* is that the former term points to the primary reading of the figurative sign in question, whereas the latter is conceptual rather than semantic in nature. Both notions differ from the *image component*, which denotes a part of the lexicalised meaning of a given figurative unit.

In other words, the inner form of a lexical item is a combination of the mental image fixed in its content plane and the motivation of its lexicalised meaning. Speakers derive the inner form of a lexical item from the meanings of its constituent morphemes or words.

As for the notion of *etymological memory* (also known as *cultural memory*), this can be defined as traces of the figurative past of a given lexical unit that are accessible in the present.<sup>13</sup> The synchronic motivation of a conventional fig-

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West-European thought, and anticipated or influenced further development of Structuralism and semiotics, in particular, the traditions of “deep semiotics” (*glubinnaia semiotika*, represented by V. Vinogradov, G. Vinokur), Russian linguistics and the Prague School of linguistics, neuro-linguistics (L. Vygotsky, A. Lurija), ethnic psychology (C. Levi-Strauss, R. Jakobson).”

<sup>13</sup> Elements of etymological memory can influence the use of lexical items of all types, not only units of figurative language (cf. Apresjan 1995 in this regard). Apresjan points to the study of Abaev (1948) in which this notion was introduced. Here we concentrate on conventional figurative units as the main subject of this study.

urative unit often does not coincide with the “true” etymology of that unit. In most cases, what is important for the functioning of a figurative expression is synchronic motivation, i.e. how most speakers intuitively construct the motivational “bridges”. However, in some rare cases a given unit of figurative language may exhibit restrictions on its use that can only be explained by addressing its history, i.e. this figurative unit cannot be used in contexts that are not compatible with its etymological origin, even where speakers do not know the etymology. In such cases, the etymological memory of a given conventional figurative unit is extremely important. For more details, see chapter 4.

The specific feature of the image component, as compared to similar notions, is that it takes on the role of a semantic bridge between two levels of the figurative unit’s conceptual structure, i.e. between its meaning proper (that is the actual or lexicalised figurative) and the literal interpretation of the underlying lexical structure which triggers the corresponding mental image. The image component consists of linguistically relevant traces of an image that are comprehensible to the majority of speakers.

The basic difference between the inner form and the image component can be illustrated with an example. Idioms such as English *to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut*, Russian *стрелять из пушек по воробьям* and German *mit Kanonen nach/auf Spatzen schießen* (both literally “to shoot with cannons at sparrows”) have very similar actual meanings that can be roughly described as ‘to try to achieve a goal by investing a great deal of effort and using a means that is too powerful for achieving this goal, which obviously does not require such effort; the consequence is that the results are insignificant when compared to the wasted effort’. The image component provides conceptual material that is used in constructing the actual meaning, namely the idea that the means is fully inappropriate for achieving a given goal, in that it is too powerful, so that the subject of this action is wasting energy. Thus, traces of the underlying image can be found in all parts of the semantic definition.

An important feature of the image component is that it does not point to all details of the “rich image” but exploits only those traces of the source concept that are relevant for the actual meaning. This enables us to concentrate on the conceptual structures which provide the semantic bridge between source and target concepts. On the level of “rich images” there is, of course, a great difference between “cracking a nut with a sledgehammer” and “shooting with cannons at sparrows”. All relevant conceptual details are part of the inner form rather than of the image component. These different images are used to convey the same general idea fixed in the semantic definition. However, since native speakers are aware of these details of mental imagery while processing the idiom, the conceptual details have to be described as relevant parts of the idiom’s content plane.

Not all the features of the “rich images” have to be addressed in a semantic definition of every conventional figurative unit. Nevertheless, conceptual details of this kind are psychologically real. Being a part of the inner form, they can be addressed in non-standard contexts, i.e. in puns and contexts that include intentional plays on words.

The criterion of image requirement is connected with the notion of motivation (see chapter 4 for details) but does not depend on it directly. It is obvious that figurative units that are fully motivated from the synchronic perspective (like *to burn one's boats*) have a more salient image component than idioms, which are more opaque synchronically (like *to kick the bucket*). Yet, it would be wrong to say that *to kick the bucket* is not figurative and has no image component or inner form.

Even if speakers do not reflect on the motivating links between the mental image fixed in the lexical structure of an expression and its actual meaning, they are certainly aware of the specifics of the expression that make it different from literal expressions. Lexical units with no transparent motivating links, such as *to kick the bucket*, are perceived as figurative because they clearly refer to their denotata by using other concepts, and their secondary nature is obvious. Speakers are certainly aware of the fact that this idiom means something different from what is said literally. This discrepancy, and the possibility of a literal interpretation of the word string in question, provide speakers with the knowledge that they are speaking figuratively when using such an idiom. Besides, even opaque structures can become motivated in special contexts or sometimes individually, as speakers may have their own explanations for the relevant motivating links other than the original etymology, or even possess etymological knowledge.

### 1.3.3 Additional naming

The second criterion can be called *additional naming*. A unit of figurative language is not the only way to say what is meant. Normally, there is already a more direct and cognitively simple expression denoting approximately the same entity (compare, for instance, *to reveal a secret* vs. *to spill the beans*, *to become angry* vs. *to hit the ceiling* or *to deal successfully with a problem* vs. *to clear a hurdle*). The figurative units are, so to speak, additional (not primary) means for naming things, properties, actions, states, events, and the like.

The semantic surplus value of figurative units has often been stressed; we have illustrated this by the idiom (*to be caught*) *between a rock and a hard place* in (1–7). This criterion seems to be evident, and it is consistent with the “traditional” view of figurative language as a secondary, not obligatory or even ornamental part of the linguistic system. However, the practical application of this criterion meets

certain difficulties. Firstly, there are many lexical units that have synonyms, some of which may look more basic (compare e.g. *to tell* vs. *to communicate*, *to happen* vs. *to occur*, *aim* vs. *purpose*). In such cases, the existence of different ways to say nearly the same thing does not allow us to conclude that one of the (near-)synonyms is literal and another one is figurative.

The second problem with this criterion arises from the fact that there are lexical units that may intuitively be perceived as figurative although they have no literal counterparts, at least not in the realm of everyday language. A good example is *seahorse*. Although there is no other English word for this kind of fish (the Latin term *hippocampus* belongs to the technical language of biological taxonomy and is, therefore, not a real literal counterpart), this expression may evoke associations based on the image that is fixed in its lexical structure. Due to its transparent constituent structure (*sea* + *horse*), it has a synchronically identifiable image component and is perceived as a conventional but metaphorically based lexical unit. However, this is not a decisive argument for qualifying *seahorse* as a figurative unit. Compare the word *hippocampus*, the Latin equivalent of *seahorse*, one element of which goes back to Greek *hippos* 'horse', the other to Greek *kampos* 'sea monster'. Hence, considered from the viewpoint of its origin, *hippocampus* is also a metaphorically based lexical item. However, nobody would argue that *hippocampus* is a figurative unit. There are many expressions in any language that are not really literal but not figurative either; *seahorse* is one of them. We do not consider this expression to be figurative, above all because it does not fulfil the criterion of additional naming. As mentioned above, there is no other possibility to name this animal within the scope of non-technical language. Of course, cases like this may be subject to discussion. This is due to certain image traces in the content plane of such expressions. We consider this understanding of figurativeness as appropriate for our purposes.

The two heuristic criteria for distinguishing between figurative and non-figurative units, *image requirement* and *additional naming*, occur in different combinations and can be developed to different degrees. The following combinations are possible:

- (i) An expression has no *image* but can take on the function of an *additional naming*. Such an expression is non-figurative, without any doubt (all synonyms are additional namings).
- (ii) An expression has an *image* but does not function as an *additional naming*. Such an expression is non-figurative as well. However, some borderline cases can be found in this domain. Compare the above-mentioned example, *seahorse*, which we regard as non-figurative. Strictly speaking, the reason for this is not only that this expression is not a real additional naming but also that the image traces have no linguistic consequences.

The word *mouse* as a term for the handheld computer device (cf. *mouse click*, *mouse pointer*) can serve as another example of this kind. The underlying image can easily be traced back, and we can even imagine contexts in which it could be exploited (e.g. when people make puns using *mouse* in the ‘animal’ sense and as a name of the computer device). Nevertheless, the word *mouse* in the latter sense is not figurative, because it is the only naming for this sort of input computer device, not an additional one.<sup>14</sup>

However, in some cases the image may be so clear, strong, and active that there could be linguistic consequences in the sense that the expression is perceived as being figurative, even though there is no “normal” synonym. The treatment of such cases depends much more on concrete research tasks than on the ontological properties of figurative language.

- (iii) An expression has a (more or less strong) *image* and “normal” synonyms, i.e. it functions as an *additional naming*. Thus, both criteria are fulfilled. Many common (non-technical) names of plants, birds, or insects belong to this group. Let us look at the lexical unit *old man’s beard*, also called *clematis*. This is a kind of climbing shrub growing on walls. The first criterion is fulfilled because there is a clear image: it is a plant that looks *as if it were the beard of an old man*. In view of the second criterion, we are dealing with a borderline case, depending on the speaker’s familiarity with the second, more technical name, the quasi-synonym *clematis*. For speakers who do not know (or do not use) the name *clematis*, the expression *old man’s beard* seems to be non-figurative because in this case it is only a “naming” like many others. If the speaker has the choice to say either *clematis* or *old man’s beard*, however, the latter expression must be considered figurative. In such cases, the question of whether we are dealing with a figurative lexical unit or not depends on the degree to which the underlying image is linguistically relevant. The stronger the image, the more likely it is that the given lexical item will be perceived as a figurative unit. It is difficult to provide a strict definition of the notion of *figurativeness* before we have analysed the different kinds of figurative language in detail. What we can do at this point is just to use the heuristic criteria suggested above and point to the extension of this notion, i.e. list the kinds of lexical units expected to be figurative.

Figurative expressions include, firstly, all novel, nontrivial metaphors and metonymies used in poetic language, and then all the conventional figurative metaphors

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<sup>14</sup> The plural can be *mice* or *mouses*. This fact indicates that *mouse* as the name of a computer accessory has become independent from the “animal mouse”.

and metonymies (words, idioms, proverbs and the like) that point to a denotatum not directly but via other concepts while there is another, simpler and more direct way to point to this denotatum. Only the latter are part of the present study.

We restrict our analysis to *conventional figurative expressions* because conventional figurative language has priority for linguistic theory.<sup>15</sup> From a theoretical perspective, it is more important to describe the lexicon with all its specifics as a part of the language system. There are still many gaps in the linguistic description of the lexicon. The novel, poetic use of language can be basically traced back to the systemic properties of the lexicon, and thus is of secondary importance for our study.

In our analysis, we will speak of *figurative expressions* or *figurative lexical units* or *units of figurative language*, using the terms interchangeably.

We use the following abbreviations:

CFL	conventional figurative language
CFLT	Conventional Figurative Language Theory
CFU	conventional figurative unit

## 1.4 Figurative language and related phenomena

In the previous sections, we encountered the trichotomy of *literal language* – *non-literal (but also non-figurative) language* – *figurative language*. In this section, we would like to shed some light on the second of these terms, *non-literal (but also non-figurative) linguistic units*. These units are related to figurative language but must be separated from it. What most figurative and non-literal utterances have in common is the existence of at least two readings, which are anchored in different conceptual levels and mostly need additional interpretation, i.e. additional cognitive operations for processing the non-literal readings.

First of all, two different phenomena have to be distinguished within the domain of non-literal yet non-figurative expressions: these expressions are either located on the level of discourse (on the text level) or grounded in the lexicon, i.e. in the language system itself.

The former group (non-figurative expressions located on the level of discourse) includes a variety of non-direct ways of speaking (indirect speech acts, irony, self-mocking, parody, sarcasm, play on words, etc.). In addition, this domain

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<sup>15</sup> Since we limit ourselves to the investigation of the figurative lexicon, linguistic analysis of literary texts, discussions of cognitive poetics (cf. Tsur 1992, 2002; Gavins and Steen 2003 among others) and cognitive stylistics (cf. e.g. Semino 2002, 2008; Naciscione 2010; Deignan, Littlemore, and Semino 2013) do not belong to the scope of our study.



includes various kinds of “classical” figures of speech (litotes, hyperbole, zeugma, oxymoron and related tropes). All linguistic units of this kind are located on the pragmatic level and have to be studied mainly within the domain of linguistic pragmatics rather than semantics.

The latter group (non-figurative expressions grounded in the lexicon) includes non-figurative metaphors and metonymies. These linguistic units (as well as conventional figurative units, i.e. figurative metaphors, metonymies, idioms etc.) must be considered within the framework of lexical semantics. It is crucial for the present study to separate *non-figurative* metaphors, metonymies and *non-figurative* phrasemes from conventional *figurative* units. Only the latter are the subject of investigation in the present study.

Our study is concerned with units of the *language system*, and not with elements located on the level of texts. The main interest of our study concentrates on the semantics of figurative units and their relation to other domains such as pragmatics (above all, connotations and relevant cultural phenomena). The subject of analysis is CFUs of the lexicon, i.e. elements of the language system, rather than figurative utterances, i.e. elements of discourse.

A problem we are facing here is that certain indirect utterances are very common and show a tendency towards conventionalisation, so that they bear a resemblance to conventional lexical units (cf. indirect speech acts such as *Can I help you?*). However, even if it is reasonable to regard these types of utterances as cognitive units (i.e. utterances that are processed holistically), they still remain units of discourse (i.e. *textual units*) rather than units of the lexicon (i.e. *lexical units*). Even so, there is not always a clear borderline between such frequent utterances and other prefabricated conventionalised units (e.g. speech formulae). Let us consider phrases like *Have a nice day; Take a seat, please; Don't mention it; How do you do? You shouldn't have!* Obviously, we are dealing with gradual differences between textual units and lexical units.

What we are concerned with in this study is the level of the lexicon at which conventional figurative lexical units can be found. With the help of the heuristic criteria proposed above, we will try to distinguish units of figurative language from related phenomena. A differentiation of this kind is necessary to identify the issues for further analysis.

#### 1.4.1 Indirect language

A number of authors concerned with metaphors and figurative language occupy themselves with phenomena related to figurative language (e.g. Norrick 1980; Gibbs 1994; Fass 1997: 28–30; Katz 1998). Not everyone in this domain makes a

distinction between *non-literal* and *figurative expressions*, cf. Sperber and Wilson (1981: 259): “An ironical utterance is traditionally analysed as literally saying one thing and figuratively meaning the opposite”. Psycholinguistic studies pay much attention to the issues of how non-literal meanings are processed and understood (see, for example, Cacciari and Glucksberg 1994; Gibbs 2001a; Gibbs and Colston 2012; Häcki Buhofer 2004 for a survey). Analysing the comprehension of irony, metaphors, idioms and proverbs can raise the same questions and lead to similar results, cf. Gibb’s *direct access view* (the non-literal, “figurative” meaning is accessed first if there is enough contextual information; Gibbs 2002) and the *graded salience hypothesis* (literal and figurative language use is ruled by the same principles of salience; Giora 1997, 1999, 2002; Giora, Fein, and Schwartz 1998). All findings in this field are supported by numerous experiments. With regard to the rich literature on these topics, we restrict ourselves to a short outline.

**Indirect speech acts:** As has been mentioned, indirect speech acts have to be separated from units of figurative language for the purpose of our study. Utterances like (10) and (11) are questions from the formal viewpoint, but expressions of gratitude and request, respectively, from the illocutionary viewpoint (cf. e.g. Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1975; Morgan 1978). In this sense, they are indirect (non-literal), but their indirectness is not based on mental imagery. It is rooted in the form of the utterance, and not in the semantics of its parts (i.e. not in the semantics of lexical units).

(10) *How can I express my thanks to you?*

(11) *Will you shut the door?*

Thus, the indirectness of such speech acts develops at the level of the utterance. It is a matter of intention whether one says things directly or in an alternative way. It is the *conversational implicatures* in the sense of Grice (1975) that allow us to interpret indirect speech acts in the right way. Even if indirect speech acts are accessed directly (cf. Gibbs 2002), they must be perceived as indirect ways of denoting a given situation.

Cross-linguistic analyses show that these implicatures, or the ways of expressing things indirectly, are not language independent. Even the classical example of an indirect speech act, *Can you pass the salt?*, is not just a question interpreted as a request on the basis of the relevant conversational implicature, but rather a conventionalised way of expressing a request typical of English, but maybe not of other languages. Pragmatic conventions effective in Russian demand that the negative subjunctive form of the modal verb should be used in cases like this;

cf. *Вы не могли бы передать соль?* “Couldn’t you pass the salt?” instead of *Вы можете передать соль?* “Can you pass the salt?” which is – although possible – not the conventional way of expressing this idea. We deal with *conventional implicatures* here using Grice’s (1975) terms. *Conventional implicatures* are conventions that have come into being more or less by chance and cannot be attributed to general pragmatic principles originating from the relevance principle in the sense of Sperber and Wilson (1986). Morgan (1978) explicitly distinguishes semantic and pragmatic set phrases and sources of idiomaticity. He proposes “usage conventions” to account for the illocutionary force of *I bet* as an indirect affirmation or *Is the Pope a Catholic?* as a standard retort to a question deemed too obvious to require an answer (cf. section 4.10).

The functioning of a certain pragmatic convention can be a matter of degree. Although strong in one language, the same pragmatic convention may have less weight in another language and operate only in contexts that support ambiguity of interpretation. Similar observations have been made by Wierzbicka (1985) and Dobrovol’skij (2001).

**Irony:** One phenomenon related to indirect speech acts is irony. The special position of irony in the field of non-literal language has often been stressed (cf. e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1981; Katz 2000; Dynel 2013; Athanasiadou and Colston 2017; Attardo 2017). Irony depends not only on what is said but also on how it is said and who says it. Various experiments have tested the understanding and processing of irony and related phenomena (e.g. Colston 1997, 2002; Giora 1995; Giora, Fein, and Schwartz 1998; Dews and Winner 1999; Kreuz et al. 1999; Giora and Fein 1999a; Colston and Gibbs 2002, 2007).

Irony involves discrepancy between the speaker’s literal statement and his/her attitude or intent. Although Gibbs (1994: 365) holds that irony reflects the “figurative mode of thinking”, we exclude ironic utterances from the scope of our study. When someone says *What lovely weather* in the midst of a rainstorm, this does not change the meaning of the adjective *lovely*. Although it is possible to ascribe the secondary meaning ‘bad’ to the word *lovely*, this would contradict the economy principle of linguistic description, because readings of this kind do not result from a profound semantic change but from universal conversational implicatures. Irony and sarcasm are closely linked, since sarcasm is a form of ironic criticism (cf. Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989; Lee and Katz 1998; Katz 2000).

Ironical and sarcastic utterances are non-literal because they point to a given situation by using linguistic signs that normally have a different meaning. However, since we restrict the scope of our study to units of the lexicon and assume that every kind of indirectness produced at the level of utterance is a phenomenon of a different nature, we will not address ironic or sarcastic use of words in this study.

**Tropes and figures of speech:** Tropes and figures of speech must also be seen from this perspective. They can be figurative, but they do not have to be. For example, litotes, which is a figure of speech based on conscious understatement and negation as a means of emphasis, is never figurative as such; cf. *It doesn't sound bad* instead of *It sounds good*, or *It's no fun being sick* instead of *It's miserable being sick*. Similarly, hyperbole (*A thousand thanks!*), paradox (*Less is more*), oxymoron (*loud silence*), euphemism (*rest room*), and zeugma (*In that year and that room he wrote many texts*) do not need to be figurative. Consider also other figures of speech like rhetorical questions, climaxes, and antitheses, or so-called figures of sound, such as alliteration, repetition or onomatopoeia (imitation of natural sounds by words). They are somehow deviant from what may be called the “normal”, “neutral” or “standard” mode of speaking because they are indirect and/or expressive to a certain extent, but they are not figurative in our sense.

Many of these cases are examples of “indirect speech” in the sense that the same intention can be expressed in an alternative, easier and/or more explicit way; but this does not mean that they are figurative. Their indirectness is rooted in a special combination of lexical units and not so much in the combination of different readings of the same sign. Here we see the difference between the phenomenon of indirect language and the phenomenon of figurative language, which is a special case of indirect language. As for the expressiveness of some of these word combinations, it arises from the necessity of the additional cognitive effort involved in understanding them (cf. *less is more* or *loud silence*). Thus, expressivity, too, is a much broader phenomenon than figurativeness.

The traditional classification of tropes and figures of speech is based on their “technical” properties, rather than any criteria of figurativeness. Therefore, they include both figurative and non-figurative expressions. If they are based on mental images and include an image component in their semantic structure, they have to be considered figurative expressions, regardless of the type of trope or figure to which they traditionally belong. Since the present study intends to investigate the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic aspects of conventional figurative language, we will concentrate only on those expressions that are simultaneously both figurative and conventional.

#### 1.4.2 Non-figurative metaphors and metonymies

Another fact that is crucial to our study is that not all metaphors and metonymies belong to the realm of figurative language. The difference between metaphor and metonymy has often been explained: *metonymy* is usually seen as something that “stands for” another thing, e.g. *a glove* standing for ‘a baseball player’. This tra-

ditional view of metonymy points to the claim that two entities are close to each other in conceptual space or contiguously related. That is, the two entities belong to one and the same domain. In contrast to this, *metaphors* consist of elements from two different domains which are related by some kind of similarity (for the notion of metonymy and the differentiation between metaphor and metonymy see among others Croft 1993, Goossens at al. 1995; Papafragou 1996; Fass 1997; Kövecses and Radden 1998; Panther and Radden 1999; Barcelona 2000; Dirven and Pörings 2002; Deignan 2005: 53–71). In many cases, metaphor and metonymy cannot be differentiated clearly. Goossens (1990), for example, coined the term *metaphonymy*, a corrupted form of the Greek words *meta-phora* and *met-onymy*.

According to the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, metaphor and metonymy are omnipresent in natural language. It is not only lexical units with a salient imagery basis, perceived as marked items, that are metaphoric. There are many “dead metaphors” such as *table legs* (cf. 1.3.1).<sup>16</sup> Words like *fruitful* in the sense of ‘productive’ or *fruitless* meaning ‘unprofitable’ also contain metaphors pointing to the conceptual mapping RESULTS ARE FRUITS, or more generally, ACTIVITIES ARE PLANTS. Metaphors of this kind can be considered non-literal, in the sense that they do not point to a concept directly but through using another concept (so we are dealing with both source and target domain here). Being non-literal, such metaphors cannot be qualified as figurative units and do not belong to the scope of our study.

The debate surrounding “metaphoric” prepositions has been mentioned in 1.3.1. Supporters of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor link, for example, the conceptual metaphor AN ACTIVITY IS A CONTAINER to expressions like *to put effort into a certain activity* (Lakoff 1987b: 434). Many spatial prepositions are conventionally used in the temporal sense and therefore are regarded as “metaphors” (e.g. *in this year* or *in the summer* are regarded as conceptualising periods of time as containers). Spatial motion verbs in the “metaphoric” or “metonymic” temporal meaning have also been mentioned.

Supporters of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor developed a theoretical framework in which different linguistic phenomena, e.g. novel metaphors, idioms, dead metaphors (as described above) and the like, can be analysed in the same terms because they refer to things which are not encoded in their primary semantic structure. In other words, the same cognitive mechanisms are responsible for all these linguistic phenomena.

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<sup>16</sup> Moreover, certain shifts in the predicate-argument structure can also be regarded as metaphoric phenomena (cf. David 2016).

In this sense, all these expressions are metaphors, but it would be wrong to qualify them as figurative. Not all metaphors are figurative. In order to be figurative, a metaphor has to possess a more or less salient image component in its meaning structure (cf. the criterion of image requirement). In addition, it has to be perceived as an indirect way of expressing the given entity. If a certain way of speaking or thinking about a given entity is the most frequent or even the only possible one, the degree of its figurativeness decreases considerably (cf. our criterion of additional naming).

What has been said about the metaphor holds for metonymy as well. There are many examples of metonymic figurative units (*a helping hand* or *to keep an eye on someone/ something*), but cases like *He ate the whole plate* are not figurative. The metonymic transfer from ‘vessels’ to their content is completely regular; it does not evoke any images. The use of this kind of metonymic expression does not imply any additional pragmatic effects. This linguistic phenomenon is known as *systematic* or *regular polysemy* (cf. Apresjan 1974a, 1974b; Padučeva 1988, 2004a; Nunberg and Zaenen 1992; Kustova 2002; Dobrovol’skij 2006; Taylor 2006; Zaliznjak 2006, 2013; Dölling 2021) and works as a powerful and near-universal mechanism for denoting conceptually related entities in a most economical and natural way.<sup>17</sup> Consider further well-known examples like *school*, *university*, *academy* and other nouns from the same semantic domain, which all have the following readings: (12) ‘an institution’, (13) ‘a building’, (14) ‘an ensemble of people’, (15) ‘certain activities’, (16) ‘a type of institution’.

(12) *Bill left school ten years ago.*

(13) *Bill’s school is just across the street.*

(14) *Bill’s school is having a trip to the seaside.*

(15) *School annoys him.*

(16) *School is one of the most important inventions of modern times.*

It would be counter-intuitive to regard only the first reading as literal and all the others as figurative. For more details, see Bierwisch (1983) and Kiefer (1990: 3–4). An even more striking example of non-figurative metonymy is the so-called

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<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon of regular polysemy can also be found (at least to a certain extent) in the domain of idioms (cf. Dobrovol’skij 2004).

meaning extension typical of the English verb system, cf. *John opened the door* – *The door opened*. The result of this kind of metonymic transfer is a restructuring of the verb's argument frame, called a diathetical shift, i.e. a semantic and syntactic transformation that is grammatical rather than lexical by nature.

It is obvious that transformations like this differ profoundly from metonymies such as *a helping hand*. The non-literalness and at the same time non-figurativeness of the former, and the figurativeness of the latter, have many significant linguistic consequences. Whereas regular, non-figurative metonymic expressions can be used without any combinatorial restrictions in all types of contexts, figurative expressions based on metonymy are restricted in their usage. Thus, even if there is a kind of shared knowledge in the English speech community that *hand* can metonymically stand for *ACTIVITY*, it is not possible to replace the word *activity* with the word *hand* in all contexts. Cf. *I find my recent activities very exciting* vs. *\*I find my recent hands very exciting*.

### 1.4.3 Phraseology

Phraseology will be the topic of chapter 2. Since phraseology and figurative language overlap to a great extent, we have to anticipate briefly here some aspects of phraseology which will be discussed in detail later. The aim is to separate figurative units from non-figurative ones.

We start with the assumption that idioms are the core category of phraseology and that they are prototypical examples of conventional *figurative* units. This does not mean, however, that the figurativeness of every single idiom is perceptible in the same way. Rather, we can observe a *gradual figurativeness*. Some borderline cases have to be discussed where the label *figurative* is not so obvious. We further assume that various proverbs are figurative, although there are also a number of non-figurative units in this class (cf. example (22) below). This section aims at discovering some possibly non-figurative idioms and proverbs.

Unmotivated (or opaque) idioms like *to pull someone's leg* 'to play a joke on someone, to tease someone playfully' are still figurative (see chapter 4 on motivation). The lexical structure of the idiom reveals a clear image component. What is "opaque" is the link between this lexical structure and the actual meaning of the idiom. The *motivation* of an idiom has to be separated from its *figurativeness*.

In view of idioms suspected of being non-figurative, we have to pay attention to one special group, namely expressions containing "unique constituents", i.e. words which do not function outside the structure of a given conventional expression. As strongly irregular expressions, we will count them among the class of

idioms. As for their figurativeness, they might be regarded as borderline cases. Still, we do not exclude this group of expressions from the scope of our analysis.

This special group of idioms is significant in view of CFUs in general and has attracted the interest of linguists of various languages for a long time. In the Anglo-Saxon linguistic tradition, the term *cranberry collocation* is known for the phenomenon of “expressions containing unique constituents” (e.g. Moon 1998: 21).<sup>18</sup> The term goes back to the *cranberry morph*, a unique and opaque word element, like *cran-* in the compound *cranberry* (cf. Makkai 1972: 43). In the earlier Russian and German tradition, terms like *некротизмы* (*nekrotizmy*) ‘necrotisms’ or *уникальные компоненты* (*unikal’nye komponenty*) ‘unique components’ and *unikale Elemente / Unikalia* ‘unique elements’ or *unikale Komponenten* ‘unique components’ have been used (e.g. Rajštein 1980; Mel’čuk and Reuther 1984; Fleischer 1997; Stumpf 2015).

Other studies in this field – written in German (Feyaerts 1994; Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 1994) – prefer the term *phraseologisch gebundenes Formativ* (‘phraseologically bound formative’) because not every “unique constituent” is restricted to one single idiom; some of them can be encountered in several idioms although they are never used as free words. They are therefore not unique, in the strict sense, but are bound to certain phrasemes. Compare similar arguments in Holzinger (2018). For example, German *Hucke* is a phrasologically bound constituent, even though it occurs in three or more idioms, cf. (17–19).

- (17) *jmdm. die Hucke voll lügen* “to lie someone’s *Hucke* full”  
‘to tell (someone) a pack of lies’
- (18) *jmdm. die Hucke voll hauen* “to beat someone’s *Hucke* full”  
‘to give someone a good beating’
- (19) *sich die Hucke vollsaufen* “to drink one’s *Hucke* full”  
‘to drink a lot of alcohol, to get drunk’

Although no actual meaning can be attached to the word *Hucke* synchronically, these idioms are motivated by the other parts of the construction (*voll* ‘full’ and *lügen* ‘to lie’, *hauen* ‘to beat’, *saufen* ‘to drink/booze’). The question whether or not these idioms are figurative cannot be answered unequivocally. However, several factors can be listed that partly meet our criteria of figurativeness, though these factors are not immediately obvious. On the one hand, the word *Hucke* is

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<sup>18</sup> Stumpf (2018) prefers the term *unique components*.



semantically empty and does not provide a clear mental image. We can call this *constituent opacity*, which is an additional factor of irregularity. On the other hand, speakers perceive idioms (17–19) as non-literal units, based on semantic reinterpretation. We define this phenomenon as a *hidden image component*. Finally, idioms of this kind are instances of additional naming, a factor that fulfils one of our criteria of figurativeness. We postulate a broader peripheral zone for such cases. Cf. also (20).

(20) *(to be) in high (deep/great) dudgeon*

‘(to be) very angry because someone has treated one badly; (to be) in a state of deep resentment’

The constituent *dudgeon* is unique and is restricted to expression (20); the modifying adjective varies to some extent. The origin of *dudgeon* in the sense of ‘resentment’ is unknown; thus, this word as well as the whole expression can be considered opaque. Idioms (17–19) are motivated while idiom (20) is not: it has no literal reading based on other constituents [cf. German *lügen, hauen, saufen* in (17–19)]. Therefore, examples (17–19) can be related to certain conceptual structures that can take on the role of mental images, whereas (20) cannot. No image component can be directly extracted from its lexicalised meaning. The criterion of additional naming, however, applies to (20) as well. If we assume a graduation of figurativeness with a peripheral zone between figurative and non-figurative idioms, cases like (20) are located on the outermost border of this area.

The number of examples like (20), revealing a low degree of figurativeness, varies from one language to another (compared with e.g. Russian, the English language provides only a few such cases); see section 2.3.1 for more details. However, many idioms containing a unique constituent are figurative insofar as the unique constituents allows the discovery of image components on the basis of a literal reading of their individual elements, cf. (21).

(21) German *jmdm. den Laufpass geben* ‘to give someone the run-passport’  
‘to dismiss someone (a partner in a relationship or the like)’

The word *Laufpass* does not exist outside the lexical structure of (21), but it is still interpretable due to its parts *Lauf*- ‘run’ and *-pass* ‘passport’. Therefore, the image of giving a “run-passport” to someone can be regarded as a motivating link between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of this idiom. The idiom is also an additional name, so that both criteria of figurativeness are fulfilled.

As far as the languages analysed in this study are concerned, the phenomenon of *constituent opacity* is confined to the classes of idioms and restricted col-

locations.<sup>19</sup> Unique constituents, however, exist within the class of proverbs as well, but most of them are semantically transparent. Therefore, they have to be considered figurative in any case and are of no significance for this discussion.

Concerning proverbs, there are several lexical units that consist of words taken in their literal meaning. The phraseological character of this type of proverb is not based on figurativeness but on the stability of their form and the prescriptive illocutionary force. This means that a proverb always recommends a certain way of behaviour. Non-figurative proverbs are to be distinguished from figurative ones, cf. (22–23). Only the second type of proverb (23) belongs to the scope of our study.

- (22) *every beginning is hard*  
‘it is always difficult at the beginning’

- (23) *a new broom sweeps clean*  
‘those new in office are generally very zealous at first, and sometimes ruthless in making changes’

Non-figurative proverbs are of no importance for research in the field of figurative language. However, they may be interesting in some cases of cross-linguistic (and cross-cultural) analysis starting from target concepts in paremiology. There are, for instance, some non-figurative proverbs that match figurative ones expressing precisely the same idea. These examples may be worth considering in view of the pragmatic function of such expressions; cf. (24–25).

- (24) German *kleine Ursache, große Wirkung* “small cause, great effect”

- (25) English *great oaks from little acorns grow*  
both meaning ‘great effects can result from small causes’

The two proverbs are regarded as equivalent, despite the fact that one is non-figurative and the other is highly figurative. Both proverbs are isomorphic in their structure: *great oaks* standing for ‘great effects’ (oaks being the biggest trees in the climatic zone of Central Europe) and *little acorns* (the small fruits of the oak

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<sup>19</sup> The German constituent *Hinblick* is unique to the restricted collocation *im Hinblick auf* ‘with regard to’, but it is fully transparent, due to the verb *hinblicken* ‘to look (across)’, see 2.3.3. Unique constituents in proverbs mainly occur in languages that tend to use compounds as a means of word formation, e.g. *Müßiggang* in the German proverb *Müßiggang ist aller Laster Anfang* “Idleness is the beginning of all vices”.

tree) standing for ‘small causes’. However, proverb (24) does not belong to the scope of our study because it is not figurative.

All the linguistic phenomena considered in this chapter are related to the phenomenon of figurativeness in one sense or another. In what follows, we will restrict the subject of analysis to conventional units of figurative language, above all to those which belong to the core of this domain, i.e. idioms, idiomatic similes, figurative proverbs and restricted figurative collocations, as well as one-word metaphors and metonymies with a strong image component.