

## Rhetorical Figures in the Stylistic Structures of Literary and Non-Literary Texts\*\*

**Abstract.** The study briefly presents the ways in which rhetorical figures appear in today's language (in media, in commercials, in scholarly and literary texts). Examples taken from English and Hungarian justify that figures acquire important roles in both everyday and in literary texts; what is more, they can be determining factors from the aspects of style and meaning. Summarising all the above mentioned, the paper concludes that the frequent presence of figures is a universal trait, that is, it is independent of languages. Secondly, the paper recommends that a task of this kind of analysis would include further investigation concerning the peculiarities of individual languages and authors.

**Резюме.** У статті представлено особливості вживання риторичних фігур у різних галузях лінгвістики, а саме: у мові газет, реклам, науки і літератури. Наведені нами англо- та угорськомовні приклади є доказами того, що риторичні фігури відіграють важливу роль як у розмовному, так і в художньому стилі. Окрім того, особливість тексту певним чином залежить від прикмет стильової приналежності та його значення. У цілому, дослідження показало: використання риторичних фігур є універсальною, незалежною від мов особливістю. Надалі важливим завданням є дослідження художньої мови (використання риторичних фігур, метафор тощо), характерної для прозаїків та поетів.

**Rezümé.** A tanulmány azt mutatja be röviden, hogy a retorikai alakzatok a mai nyelvhasználat különböző területein (sajtónyelv, reklám, tudományos nyelv, szépirodalom) hogyan jelennek meg. Az angol és magyar nyelvű példák igazolják, hogy az alakzatok egyaránt fontos szerepet kaphatnak a hétköznapi és a szépirodalmi szövegtípusokban is. Sőt, a szöveg jellegét meghatározóak lehetnek a stílus és a jelentés szempontjából. Összegzésként megállapítja a dolgozat, hogy az alakzatok gyakori jelenléte univerzális sajátosság, azaz nyelvektől független, ugyanakkor lényeges további feladat az egyes nyelvekre, írókra, költőkre jellemző sajátos vonások vizsgálata ezen a téren.

### 1. Introduction

Rhetorical figures, since the ancient times, up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have been chiefly scrutinised in rhetorical speeches and lyric works. In fact, these figures cannot only be linked to these types of texts (or genres) but can be essential components, determining structural and semantic features, of the style of any kind of text. Consequently, the examination of the function of figures is a relevant part of the description of language striving at complexity.

There are several methods of the examination of figures, depending on the theoretical background and its aims (cf. Szathmári ed. 2003, Pethő 2011). In what follows, I will briefly demonstrate, through a few examples, the variety of roles that figures may fulfil in the stylistic structure of various literary and non-literary texts of today.

\* A Nyíregyházi Főiskola Nyelv- és Irodalomtudományi Intézetének intézetigazgató főiskolai tanára. \* Ніредьгазька вища школа, директор Інституту мовознавства та літературознавства.

\* College Professor, Institute Director College of Nyíregyháza. \*

\*\* A tanulmányt dr. Bárány Erzsébet és dr. Tukacs Tamás lektorálta.

## **2. The rhetorical (“traditional”) and functional-cognitive approaches to figures**

In classical rhetoric, and in the subsequent rhetorics built upon this, the formation of figures is usually explained with the so-called deviance theory (cf. e.g., Knape 1996: 295). The point of this theory is that a figure is the result of a deviance from everyday, that is, neutral or “normal” forms. In Book 9 of Quintilian’s *Rhetoric*, he defines the concept of figure in the following way: “Figure, as the word says, is a certain conformation of speech removed from, and that which first presents itself” (*Figura, sicut nomine ipso patet, conformatio quaedam orationis remota a communi et primum se offerenteratione*; Quintilianus 9, 1, 4). Deviance also means that a figure is, in fact, a linguistic transgression, a stylistic error, barbarism, soloecismus<sup>1</sup>—but it is an error that, with proper justification, and as a result of authorial intention, becomes a stylistic virtue (cf. Knape 1996).

The functional-cognitive approach of figures is relatively recent, and it has but a few decades of history. Before summarising the most important tenets in this respect, a brief summary of functional-cognitive linguistics itself seems appropriate.

Functional-cognitive linguistics is one of the most modern schools of linguistic theory and practice. It approaches language from the aspect of cognition and knowledge, and considers the formation, accessibility and comprehension of meaning as its main function. Thus, its main characteristics and aims (cf. Geeraerts – Cuyckens eds. 2007, Evans 2013, Tolcsvai Nagy 2013) are the following:

1. Functional-cognitive linguistics gives meaning a central position in the grammar. Linguistic structures are thought to express conceptualizations, that is, conceptualization is central for linguistic structure.
2. One of the central tenets of cognitive linguistics is its usage-based orientation. Discourse is then no longer the mere application of grammatical rules, but the grammatical rules themselves are motivated by the discourse functions that the grammar has to fulfil.
3. Production and comprehension are inherent parts of the linguistic system.
4. The emphasis on the dynamic nature of language, that is, the meaning of linguistic expressions is formed in a flexible way in the context of the moment of utterance.
5. The application of Prototype Theory: belonging to a category is the question of degrees in the case of linguistic phenomena as well. Individual examples fall into one category on the basis of common experience and family resemblance. The borders of categories are not always clearly defined.

<sup>1</sup> The use of inappropriate words such as archaisms, neologisms, and changes in the sound and form of a word are called barbarisms (*barbarismus*), and the breach of the syntactic construction is a soloecism (Sloane ed. 2001: 745).

A fuzzy category, which can be contrasted with a classical category, is a category whose members exhibit degrees of family resemblance, with the category borders not being clearly defined.

Applying these fundamental principles, functional-cognitive linguistics emphasises the following aspects in the description of figures:

1. The formation of meaning (that is, the pragmatic-semantic aspect) shall be emphasised in the examination of figures.
2. A new concept of variability, taking more recent views on norm into consideration, is also necessary for the research of figures.
3. To uncover the proper stylistic value of figures, empirical research is needed.

### ***3. Figures in texts***

In what follows, I am going to discuss the figures of three everyday fields of language use and the figures of literary texts. With these examples, I wish to represent the way figures contribute to the meaning of texts. I have selected the examples of various English and Hungarian text tokens. I do not intend to discuss language-specific differences here. Instead, I wish to emphasise the similarities in the use of figures.

#### ***3.1 Figures in journalism***

Journalism is a determining part of our lives. We obtain most information from the media, and thus it influences our way of thinking to a considerable degree. It is then worthwhile knowing what figures journalists use to capture our attention and to achieve a particular effect.

It can be asserted that today's journalism likes to use various figures, especially in titles, since "a good title is half the success; what is more, with a sort of aphoristic exaggeration, the title is more important than the work itself" (Kovalovszky 1974: 326). The title deserves special attention because it essentially affects the reception of the text. A (good) heading provides global cohesion and gives preliminary information that influences the attribution of style as well. In this respect, it is a vital part of the formation of stylistic structure.

Examining titles, I shall highlight two figures, alliteration and rhetorical question. The reason for my choice is that, as my previous research attested, these figures are frequent and essential parts of generating meaning in journalistic titles (cf. e.g., Pethő 2011: 51–53). The second reason is that they belong to various levels of language: alliteration is a sound figure, the rhetorical question is a transformation on the level of the sentence. Let us have a look at the examples.

### Alliteration

Alliteration is repetition of the same letters (sounds) within nearby words. Its main function is getting attention. In journalism, it is particularly popular in headings of articles. It is for this reason that I have taken my examples mostly, though not exclusively, from such magazines.

*Strickly stars secret waltz up aisle* (Daily Star, front page, 31 December 2013)

*British bomb blew up jet* (Daily Star, front page, 13 March, 2014)

*Fan fury at 'foreign invasion'* (Daily Star, front page, 14 April, 2014)

*Szép széria a szurkolókkal!* (Kelet-Magyarország, 27 February 2015)

(‘Fine series with the fans’)

*Kifestőkönyv készült magyar motívumokkal* (Kárpátalja.ma, 3 March, 2015)

(‘Colouring book with Hungarian motifs’)

*Kim Kardashian a tengerparton is túsarkúban tipeg* (Blikk, 13 March, 2015)

(‘Kim Kardashian waddles in high-heels on the sea coast’)

*Megjelent az első miniszobor Munkácson* (Kárpátalja.ma, 22 March, 2015)

(‘The first mini statue in Munkács’)

*Karácsonyi készülődés a boldog békeidőkben* (Kárpátalja.ma, 25 December 2014)

(‘Christmas preparations in the good old days’)

### Rhetorical question

A rhetorical question is a question to which no answer is expected, where the answer itself is implied in the question. It is a stylistic device to evoke emotion and attention. It is frequently ironic these days.

*The world remembers. But what, if anything, have we learnt?* (The Independent, 7 June 2014)

*Have the 50 Shades women made movie magic or a spanking great flop?* (Daily Mail, 12 February 2015)

*Now will we ever find truth on abuse dossier?* (Daily Mail, 23 January 2015)

*Emma Watsonnal kavar Harry herceg?* (Blikk, 22 February 2015)

(‘Emma Watson going out with Prince Harry?’)

*Szakítás? Heves vita az Éden Hotelben!* (Blikk, 22 February 2015)

(‘Break-up? Heated debate at Hotel Eden’)

*DiCaprio a Szürke ötven árnyalatának sztárjára hajt?* (Blikk, 26 February 2015)

(‘DiCaprio chasing the star of Fifty Shades of Grey?’)

As the following examples demonstrate, not only popular magazines, but more serious, scientific journals also feature rhetorical figures in their titles. The samples are taken from a single issue, *Kárpátaljai Szemle* (issue 3-4, year 1993):

*Nagyüzemi agrármérnökök helyett pedagógusok?*

(‘Teachers instead of agricultural engineers?’)

*Színházat csinálunk?*

(‘Are we making a theatre?’)

*Vissza – de milyen hagyományokhoz?*

(‘Back to – what kind of traditions?’)

*Miért verte meg Isten és a történelem ilyen kegyetlenül Ukrajnát?*

(‘Why have God and history so brutally struck Ukraine?’)

*Reális-e egy új „vasfüggöny” veszélye?*

(‘Is the threat of a new iron curtain real?’)

### 3.2 *Figures in commercials*

Commercials as communicative forms and text types are gaining more and more significance these days. Their main functions include the following:

- orienting attention (raising, directing and keeping attention),
- orienting memory (recording information and reminding),
- orienting emotions (creating surprise and forming emotional bonds),
- orienting will (motivating to buy and influencing choice) (Trombitás 2004: 50–51).

Previous research (cf. Pethő 2011: 132–138) has convincingly that figures are frequently used linguistic means in order to achieve the above aims, especially in slogans. Let us see some examples.

#### **Alliteration**

*Britain’s best business bank.* (Allied Irish Bank)<sup>2</sup>

*Don’t dream it. Drive it.* (Jaguar)

*Functional... Fashionable... Formidable...* (Fila)

*Felejthetetlenül finom* (Pick szalámi)

(‘Unforgettably delicious’)

*Házhoz hozzuk a humort.* (Comedy Central televíziós csatorna)

(‘We deliver humour to your house’)

*A versengés a vérünkben van.* (Seat autó)

(‘Competition is in our blood’)

<sup>2</sup>The source of English-language alliteration examples: Timothy R. V. Foster: *The Art and Science of the Advertising Slogan*. <http://www.adslogans.co.uk/ans/creslo01.html>, retrieved: 28 March, 2015

### Chiasmus

Chiasmus is a figure of speech by which the order of the terms in the first of two parallel clauses is reversed in these cond. This may involve a repetition of the same words or just a reversed parallel between two corresponding pairs of ideas (cf. Baldick 2008: 52–53).

*A borok királya, a királyok bora* (Tokaji bor)

(‘The king of wines, the wine of kings’)

*A vonatok királya – a királyok vonata.* (Orient expressz)

(‘The king of trains, the train of kings’)

*Minden szinten szinte minden* (Corvin Áruház)

(A word play involving the Hungarian words *szint* [‘floor, storey’] and *szinte* [‘almost’]. In this commercial of a supermarket, the literal translation is: ‘Almost everything at every floor’)

*You can take it out of the country, but you can't take the country out of it* (Salem cigarettes)<sup>3</sup>

*Starkist doesn't want tuna with good taste, Starkist wants tuna that tastes good!* (Starkist Tuna)

*I am stuck on Band-Aid, and Band-Aid's stuck on me* (Band-Aid bandages)

### Antithesis

Antithesis is a juxtaposition of contrasting words or sentences. Antithesis highlights and thus emphasises certain elements:

*A hold fel, az ár le* (Esso Oil Company)

(‘Moon up, price down’)

*A legnagyobb legkisebb* (Toyota Yaris car make, an antithesis and a hyperbole at the same time)

(‘The biggest smallest’)

*Maximális tisztítás, minimális erőfeszítés* (Cif scouring powder)

(‘Maximal cleaning, minimal effort’)

*Spend a little – Live a lot.* (Aldi, UK)<sup>4</sup>

*Big enough to cope, small enough to care.* (AFG Law, UK)

*Small enough to care – Big enough to deliver.* (Air Cargo Portugal)

<sup>3</sup> The source of English language examples of chiasmus: Nick Skellon: Chiasmus –examples & definition. [http://www.speaklikeapro.co.uk/What\\_is\\_chiasmus.htm](http://www.speaklikeapro.co.uk/What_is_chiasmus.htm), retrieved: 28 March, 2015

<sup>4</sup> The source of English language examples of antithesis: Slogans.de; <http://www.slogans.de/index.php>, retrieved: 28 March, 2015

### 3.3 *Figures in scholarly texts*

Scholarly texts are almost incompatible with lyricism and classic-style rhetoric. However, as the following examples demonstrate, such texts also exhibit figures. Scholarly texts are generally characterised by a high degree of cohesion, logical structure, and it is these features that the frequent appearance of parallelism and opposites may be justified with. The accumulation of sentence parts and expressions are frequent as means of compression and the listing of data for purposes of proving, etc. Questions often appear as means of raising attention and enlivening the text:

Our survey was carried out in Subcarpathian 1996 on a sample of 144 adult minority Hungarians stratified for *age, education and settlement type*. Data was collected (concerning *language use and linguistic attitudes*) on 324 *sociolinguistic variables* and on 60 *linguistic variables*. The subjects [...] were chosen to represent *three age groups* [...], *two different levels of education* [...], and *four settlement types*... [...]

The five tasks were the following:

- 1. *Grammaticality judgments, sentence selection. The subject had to decide which one of two provided sentences s/he considered more acceptable;*
- 2. *Grammaticality judgments, sentence correction. The subject had to decide whether s/he regarded a sentence as acceptable or not[...]*
- 3. *Fill in the blanks, lexical. [...]*
- 4. *Fill in the blanks, inflectional. [...]*
- 5. *Fill in the blanks, profession name. [...]*

(Source: Csernicskó, István and Fenyvesi, Anna. “Sociolinguistic and Contact-induced Variation in Hungarian Language Use in Subcarpathia, Ukraine.” AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 [2012]: <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>)

**Applied rhetoric.** If rhetoric often stands for both the *production and analysis* of persuasive discourse, applied rhetoric generally refers to *the rhetoric analysis* of texts rather than their *actual creation*. Rhetoric’s *concepts and tools* are usually marshalled for the purpose of analyzing texts, *but what is rhetorical analysis?* The case studies discussed below imply that there are many answers to that question.

(Source: Craig Hamilton: Applied rhetoric and stylistics in Anglo-Saxon countries in the 20th and 21st centuries. In: Fix, Ulla – Gardt, Andreas – Knappe Joachim [ed.] *Rhetorik und Stilistik/Rhetoric and stylistics*. 1. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008: 552.)

### 3.4 *Alakzatok a szépirodalomban*

It is difficult to determine the extent to which these figures infiltrate the incredibly varied literature of the present day. The scale ranges from the aesthetic

function going back to the ideals and ideas of antiquity to the stylistic games of postmodernism. Individual styles may also be characterised by certain rhetorical figures.

The figure of accumulation becomes a factor of textual organisation of the following poem by Nobel Prize winner poet Seamus Heaney. On the one hand, this happens in relation to memory, that is, reminiscences are evoked by nominal accumulation. On the other hand, one of the main stylistic devices of compressive description is also accumulation. I am quoting the first stanza, highlighting the instances of accumulation:

### Seeing Things

Inishbofinon a Sunday morning.  
*Sunlight, turfsmoke, seagulls, boatslip, diesel.*  
 One by one we were being handed down  
 Into a boat that *dipped and shilly-shallied*  
 Scaresomely everytime. We sat tight  
 On shortcross-benches, in *nervous* twos and threes,  
*Obedient, newly close*, nobody speaking  
 Except the boatmen, as the gunwales sank  
 And seemed they might ship water any minute.  
 The sea was very calm but even so,  
 When the engine kicked and our ferryman  
*Swayed for balance, reaching for the tiller,*  
 I panicked at the *shiftiness and heft*  
 Of the craft itself. What guaranteed us –  
 That *quick response and buoyancy and swim–*  
 Kept me in agony. All the time  
 As we went sailing evenly across  
*The deep, still, seeable-down-intowater,*  
 It was as if I looked from another boat  
 Sailing through the air, far up, and could see  
 How riskily we fared into the morning,  
 And loved in vain our *bare, bowed, numbered* heads.

A determining stylistic device is figurative language of the poems of one of the most significant poets in Kárpátalja, Kovács Vilmos, as well. It is well demonstrated by the short segment from his poem entitled “The Earth has fever!”:

Nem tudom, mertél-e  
 perbe szállni velük, vagy hallgattál gyáván,

de voltak, akik felkeltek és jöttek:  
dobogó szívükből rakni a dermedt  
éjszakába lobogó máglyát.

(‘I don’t know if ever you dared  
to plead with them or you were cowardly and silent,  
but there were those who arose and came:  
to build a bonfire into the frozen night  
from their beating hearts.’)

In this extract, various rhetorical figures, such as rhetorical questions (*mertél-e / perbe szállni velük, vagy hallgattál gyáván* [?]; ‘if you ever dared / to plead with them or you were cowardly and silent’), and accumulation (*felkeltek és jöttek*; ‘who arose and came’) are combined with metaphorisation (*dobogó szívükből rakni a dermedt / éjszakába lobogó máglyát*; ‘to build a bonfire into the frozen night / from their beating hearts’). The compressed language results in an exceptionally forceful style.

#### 4. Summary

In the above, I attempted to demonstrate that

- a) the figurative language can be determining, but in various functions depending on text types;
- b) the presence of figures is universal, that is, independent of languages.

In future research, it shall be considerably important to uncover

- a) language-specific traits,
- b) individual traits in the case of literary texts.

The deeper knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of figures may be important from the aspect of the success of everyday communication, and the right interpretation of literary texts as well.

#### REFERENCES

- BALDICK, CHRIS 2008. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- EVANS, VYVYAN 2007. *A Glossary of Cognitive Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- GEERAERTS, DIRK – CUYCKENS, HERBERT (eds.) 2007. *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- KNAPE, JOACHIM 1996. Figurenlehre. In: Ueding, Gert (Hg.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*. 3. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 289–342.
- KOVALOVSKY, MIKLÓS 1974. A cím stilsztikája. In: Imre Samu – Szathmári István – SzűtsLászló (szerk.): *Jelentés és stilsztika*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 326–32.
- PETHŐ, JÓZSEF 2011. *Alakzat és jelentés. Az alakzatok stílus- és jelentésképző szerepe a szövegben*. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó.
- QUINTILIANUS, MARCUS FABIVS 1959. *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis oratoriae libri XII. Pars II. Libros VII–XII continens*. Ed. by Radermacher, Ludwig. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- SLOANE, THOMAS O. ed. 2001. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*. Oxford, New York etc.: Oxford University Press.
- SZATHMÁRI, ISTVÁN (ed.) 2003. *A retorikai-stilsztikai alakzatok világa*. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó.
- TOLCSVAI NAGY, GÁBOR 2013. *Bevezetés a kognitív nyelvészetbe*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.
- TROMBITÁS, ENDRE 2004. Az indirekt felszólítás mint az akaratorientálás eszköze a reklámban. *BGF KKKF Szakmai Füzetek* 13: 48–51.