

韩仲谦·著

Studies on English Figures
of Emotion, Excess, Falshood,
Grammar, and Hidden Meaning

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英语情感、夸张、 谬误、语法和隐义 辞格考辨



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Preface

I once mentioned that a person can only be a good writer or a good speaker when he or she is familiar with the figures of speech. We can learn the habit of eloquence by probing into various figures of speech in the English language (Han, 2013: III-IV). The English language embraces both common and unusual figures of speech, with the unusual ones greatly surpassing the common ones in number. It is a worthwhile endeavor, as has been well acknowledged, to put the hundreds of unusual figures of speech in the English language under scrutiny.

Given their large numbers, the unusual figures of speech in English go far beyond the reach of one single book. The current book becomes the second one of the writer's series dealing with the unusual figures of speech in the English language. It shares the same Chapter I (a brief introduction to figurative language) and Chapter 2 (a general survey of figures of speech or tropes in English) with the first book of the series (*A Study on the English Figures of Amplification and Distortion* by Han Zhongqian, published on December, 2013). Chapters 3-7 probe, respectively, into five types of unusual English figures of speech or tropes in some detail, namely, figures of emotion,

figures of excess and superfluity, figures of falsehood, figures of grammar, and figures of hidden meaning. As some of the members of one figure type may be bordering another figure type, a few of those which have been discussed in the first book will re-appear in different chapters of this book.

Thanks go to all those who have been helpful in my preparation of this book.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Language serves as a means of communication and cognition; it enables us to cooperate and think for ourselves with other people in the community. There are at least three different basic functions of language. One is informative—language can be used to pass on information. Another is expressive—language can be used to evoke an emotion that is not a direct result of their meaning. Still another is performative—language can be used as a kind of symbol/action in and of themselves. To perform the various functions, language can be used literally or figuratively, depending on the context(s) in which the speech act occurs, or on the speaker's or the writer's personal preference of their language habits.

No matter what functions language performs, the meaning conveyed therewith can be either literal or figurative. Some speakers or writers prefer figurative language to literal language in order to impress hearers or readers more effectively and communicate their inten-

tions more tactically.

Literal and figurative language, in fact, is a distinction within some fields of language analysis. Literal language (i. e. , denotative meaning) refers to words that do not deviate from their defined meaning. This means that words reveal the meaning that they carry. Palmer (1976:30) uses the term “reference” in talking about the denotation of words. Reference deals with the relationship between the linguistic elements, words, sentences, and the non-linguistic world of experience. Similarly, Crystal (2003:129) asserts that denotation meaning involves the relationship between a linguistic unit (lexical item) and the non-linguistic entities to which it refers. For example, the denotation meaning of “dog” is its dictionary definition of “canine quadruped”. To sum up, denotation refers to the literal meaning of a word “the dictionary definition”. When a writer or a speaker uses literal language, he or she is simply stating the facts as they are.

Figurative language (i. e. , connotative meaning) refers to words or groups of words that exaggerate or alter the usual meanings of the component words. It may involve analogy to similar concepts or other context, and may exaggerate. These alterations result in a figure of speech. Palmer (1976:63) suggests that the term connotation refers to emotive or evaluative meaning. It is also used to refer to linguistic or even dialectal differences or even to the small differences that are found near synonyms. According to Crystal (1992:80), connotation is the personal or emotional associations that are suggested by words, and which thus form part of their meaning, for individual speakers; for example, the word *automation* may connote “efficiency” to one person, and, “rounder” to another.

On the other hand, Parker and Riley (2009: 23) use “non literal

locutionary acts” to refer to the connotation. They point out that “non literal locutionary acts” are those for which a literal interpretation is either impossible or absurd within the context of the utterance. For example, the famished husband who walks through the door and says to his wife, *I could eat a horse* (instead of, *I am very hungry*) is performing a non-literal locutionary act. Therefore, figurative language does not always mean what is being said or read, but serves to make it more interesting and helps painting a picture in the hearer/reader’s mind. It uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation.

To be more specific, a literal usage is the “normal” meanings of the words (Jaszczolt, 2003). It maintains a consistent meaning regardless of the context (Glucksberg, 2001), with “the intended meaning correspond[ing] exactly to the meaning” of the individual words (Harley, 2001). Figurative use of language is the use of words or phrases in a manner where the literal meaning of the words is not true or does not make sense, but “implies a non-literal meaning which does make sense or that could be true” (Montgomery et al, 2007). Within literary analysis, such terms are still used; but within the fields of cognition and linguistics, the basis for identifying such a distinction is no longer used (Barber & Stainton, 2009).

Thus, figurative language is any deliberate departure from the conventional meaning, order, or construction of words. “If something happens literally,” says children’s author Lemony Snicket (2000), “it actually happens; if something happens figuratively, it feels like it is happening. If you are literally jumping for joy, for instance, it means you are leaping in the air because you are very happy. If you are figuratively jumping for joy, it means you are so happy