

RHETORICAL SCHEMES AS GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS

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Keywords: rhetoric; construction grammar; repetition; syntax; figures of speech

That figures are part of ordinary usage, normal in the first sense of the word, has been acknowledged from Aristotle ... to Du Marsais, who affirms in the eighteenth century that [There is nothing so natural, so ordinary, and so common as figures in human language]. (Fahnestock 1999:16)

In an exciting burst of work over the last three decades, Cognitive Linguists have established that a few rhetorical figures (especially metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, the latter often combined with metonymy) are (1) fundamental to ordinary language, not just to specialized poetic or oratorical registers, because (2) they reflect the fundamentals of cognition. I will advance this argument in more 'syntactic' directions by way of Construction Grammar and our cognitive disposition for repetition.

Aristotle, Du Marsais, and many scholars in between, were not just referring to a few rhetorical figures, but to range of linguistic phenomena, including figures called *schemes*. Metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are examples of what the rhetoricians who first studied them called *tropes*, conceptual 'turns' in meaning. They operate chiefly by way of semantic frames (e.g., the domain of time is structured in monetary terms in expressions like "I wasted an hour" and "I invested a month" and "That project cost me a year"). *Schemes* are rather different, not semantic 'turns' but salient formal patterns of expression. Like tropes, schemes are susceptible to poetic and oratorical elaboration, so they have been principally noticed in such discourses (not unlike the story of metaphor), traditionally studied by rhetoricians and literary critics, and ignored by linguists. But also like tropes, schemes are (1) fundamental to ordinary language because (2) they reflect the fundamentals of cognition. Indeed, rhetorical schemes are precisely, in the terms of Construction Grammar, "stored pairings of form and function" (Goldberg & Jackendoff 2004: 533n1); and, as Mark Turner has observed the "justifications for construction grammar are essentially identical to those for the original classical rhetorical program of analyzing figures" (Turner 1998: 56).

My argument will lean on our neurocognitive disposition for repetition (brains rely on repeated neural firing patterns, cognition relies on stimulus repetition for recall), which has been studied, for instance, by Tannen (2007), and was the subject of Joan Bybee's (2006) LSA presidential address. Repetition is increasingly well understood to be a linguistically significant cognitive dimension. I will draw on ordinary-language data, such as

1. A place for everything and everything in its place.
2. Boys will be boys.
3. Yeah so we got that and we got knockers and we got bratwurst and we got
<unintelligible> wurst or kranzwurst or something I don't know. (ICE-USA-S1A-016)

Each of 1-3 exemplifies a rhetorical scheme; each is also a grammatical construction.

My claim, in short, is very general—at least some rhetorical schemes are grammatical constructions—and my argument is quite abbreviated. But it is meant chiefly as a conversation starter, to open up discussion and provoke interest in the linguistic corollaries of rhetorical schemes in emulation of Lakoff and Johnson's opening up of discussion and provocation of interest in rhetorical tropes.

References

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