THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANIAN NOMINAL METAPHORS BY MEANS OF THE GENERATIVE LEXICON

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Abstract*: This paper aims to present a new semantic approach of metaphors, and especially of the Romanian nominal metaphors. This method is based on the generative lexicon which proposes a representation of the lexical meaning that is richer and better structured than other theories. The novelty that this theory brings is that it presents rules of semantic combination which explain combinations that could not be explained by other rules.*

Keywords*: semantic interpretation, Romanian nominal metaphors, the generative lexicon.*

1. The generative lexicon

The generative lexicon represents a new method of interpreting words and it offers a more detailed representation of the meaning of a word than it was given before. The generative lexicon was proposed by Pustejovsky (1995) who showed that by using the principles of this theory, one can understand the way in which words combine in order to give various meanings. Thus, we can say that the generative lexicon, apart from being a theory of the semantic structure of lexical items, is a theory of the possibilities to combine these items.

The theory of the generative lexicon is structured on three levels of representation: the argument structure (ARGSTR), the event structure (EVENSTR) and the qualia structure (QUALIA).

The argument structure refers to the number and type of arguments selected by the lexical item: true arguments (1a), default arguments (1b), shadow arguments (1c) and true adjuncts (1d).

(1) *a. John ran.*
b. John built the house out of bricks.
c. John danced a waltz.
d. John went to the zoo on Sunday.

In (2), the lexical item *arrival* presents two arguments: a true argument referring to the person who performs the action (x) and a default argument, referring to the place being arrived at (y).

(2)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{arrival} \\ ARGSTR = \begin{bmatrix} ARG1 & = & x : individual \\ D-ARG1 & = & y : place \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

The event structure characterizes both the basic event type of the lexical item and its subeventual structure: states, processes and transitions. Therefore, activities are

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defined as processes, achievements and accomplishments are called transitions and they are defined by the combination of the two concepts: a process and a state that results. The prominence for an event is given by the HEAD marker.

(3)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{development} \\ EVENSTR = \begin{bmatrix} E1 & = & process \\ E2 & = & state \\ RESTR & = & <_{\sim} \\ HEAD & = & e1 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

The example in (3) shows that the lexical item *development* presents two subevents in its event structure, that is, a process and a state. The process takes place before the state and the focus is on the process (e1).

The qualia structure represents the novelty of the theory presented by Pustejovsky (1995). It describes four essential characteristics of the meaning of a word: the constitutive role (the relation between an object and its constituent parts: material, components), the formal role (that which distinguishes the object within a larger domain, its physical characteristics: orientation, form, dimension), the telic role (the purpose and the function of the object) and the agentive role (factors involved in the origin of the object: artefact, creator).

As we can see in (4), qualia structure helps in distinguishing between semantically related words: *novel* and *dictionary*. While both are books (formal role), what differentiates them is their structure (constitutive role): the novel is a story and the dictionary is a list of words. Another difference refers to their purpose (telic role): the novel is made to be read and the dictionary is made to be consulted. The last difference between these two objects refers to the way in which they were created (agentive role): while the novel was written, the dictionary was compiled.

(4)
$$\begin{bmatrix} novel \\ QUALIA = \begin{bmatrix} CONST & = & \text{story} \\ FORMAL & = & \text{book} \\ TELIC & = & \text{to read} \\ AGENTIV & = & \text{written} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} dictionary \\ QUALIA = \begin{bmatrix} CONST & = & \text{list of words} \\ FORMAL & = & \text{book} \\ TELIC & = & \text{to consult} \\ AGENTIV & = & \text{compiled} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

All this information related to the form, structure, purpose of the lexical item is very useful since it helps us understand how words combine in order to form correct phrases in any language.

2. The generative lexicon and the Romanian nominal metaphors

In order to see how the generative lexicon works in the case of Romanian metaphors, we will analyze some common metaphors.

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We start with the noun phrase *viperă de femeie*, which is made of the head noun *viperă* and the prepositional phrase *de femeie.* (5b) shows that the head noun presents a true argument (x) in its argument structure, a state in its event structure and in the qualia structure is presented its type (formal role) and its purpose (telic role). In other words, the purpose of this creature is to bite, to do harm when provoked. Regarding the representation in (5c), the adjunct of the head noun presents features in common with the head noun: a true argument (y) in the argument structure, a state in the event structure and type (formal role) of the lexical item in the qualia structure. Having these features in common, now we can combine the two terms in order to form a correct noun phrase. As we can see in (5d), we obtain a more detailed representation than in (5b) and this is due to the adjunct *femeie* which brings the following interpretation: the woman is like a viper, when provoked.

(5) *a. viperă de femeie*
"a viper woman"

b.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{viper} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & [ARG1 = x:viper] \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 = state] \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x \\ TELIC & = & to\ \ bite \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

c.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{woman} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & [ARG1 = y:human] \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 = state] \\ QUALIA & = & [FORMAL = y] \end{bmatrix}$$

d.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{vipera de femeie} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} ARG1 & = & x \\ D-ARG & = & y \end{bmatrix} \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 = state] \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x(viper) \wedge y(woman) \\ TELIC & = & to\ \ do\ \ harm \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

The following nominal metaphor is made of the head noun *inima* and the adjunct *oraşului.* Analyzing the representation of the head noun in (6b), we see that it presents two arguments in the argument structure (a true argument (x) and a default argument (y)), a state in the event structure and in the qualia structure we have the formal role which refers to the head noun and the constitutive role which shows that the head noun represents a part-whole relationship. The feature that makes possible the combination between the head noun and its adjunct (6c) is the constitutive role. As we can see in (6d), a new noun phrase is formed and its representation is richer than those in (6b) or (6c).

(6) *a. inima oraşului*
"the heart of town"

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b.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{inima} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} ARG & = & x \\ D-ARG & = & y \end{bmatrix} \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 \;=\; state] \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x \\ CONST & = & part_of(x,y) \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

c.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{oras} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & [ARG1 \;=\; y] \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 \;=\; state] \\ QUALIA & = & [FORMAL \;=\; y] \end{bmatrix}$$

d.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{inima orasului} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} ARG & = & x \\ D-ARG & = & y \end{bmatrix} \\ EVENSTR & = & [E_1 \;=\; state] \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x \\ CONST & = & part_of(e_1,x,y) \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

The last nominal metaphor under study, *fructul iubirii*, consists of the head noun *fructul* (7b) and the adjunct *iubirii* (7c). The feature that enables the combination of the two terms is the agentive role: the fruit is the product of love. Other possible adjuncts could be *pasiunii (of passion), neprihănirii (of righteousness),* etc.

(7) *a. fructul iubirii*
"the fruit of love"

b.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{fructul} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} ARG & = & x:fructul \\ D-ARG & = & y \end{bmatrix} \\ EVENSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} E_1 & = & stare \\ E_2 & = & proces \\ HEAD & = & e_1 \end{bmatrix} \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x \\ AGENTIVE & = & apare\ \ din\ \ floare(y,e_2) \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

c.
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{iubire} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & [ARG1 \;=\; y:iubire] \\ EVENSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} E_1 & = & stare \\ E_2 & = & proces \\ HEAD & = & e_1 \end{bmatrix} \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & y \\ TELIC & = & a\ \ da\ \ roade(e_2,y) \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

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$$d.\begin{bmatrix} \text{fructul iubirii} & & \\ ARGSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} ARG & = & x: fructul \\ D-ARG & = & y: iubirii \end{bmatrix} \\ EVENSTR & = & \begin{bmatrix} E_1 & = & stare \\ E_2 & = & proces \\ HEAD & = & e_1 \end{bmatrix} \\ QUALIA & = & \begin{bmatrix} FORMAL & = & x \\ AGENTIVE & = & iubirea(e_2, y, x) \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Conclusions:

As the examples show, we cannot combine randomly the terms in order to form phrases, but we have to take into account the information given by the representation of each lexical item. Moreover, this paper demonstrated that the generative lexicon is an efficient method in the analysis of word meaning and that Romanian nominal metaphors are better explained by means of this theory.

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