# THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION IN THE LITERARY TEXT PERCEPTION

**Carmen Fecioru**
**PhD student, „Alexandru Piru" University of Craiova**

*Abstract:The cognitive analysis of the literary works opened new pathways to integration of knowledge, developed by cognitive sciences (including neurosciences) in understanding artistic creativity. This approach tries to understand the way the perception of written text could have effects on human mind. Cognitive poetics is adapted to the research dynamic in numerous domains and in the same time it is determined by the appearance of some novel creative environments. The second half of the twentieth century assisted to the birth of a new paradigms in psychology: cognitive sciences, that focused the attention on the mental states and processes, more than on the behavior observed from outside. It has influenced quite fast some linguists that longed for more comprehensive vision of the language than the classical search for algorithms.*

*Keywords: cognitive poetics, mental space, conceptual metaphor, metonymy.*

## 1. Introduction: the cognitive architecture

In *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction (2002)*, Peter Stockwell subjects to attention the interdependence between mind, body and literature. A first step towards the understanding of the text is the reading, but not a simple one, but a multiple one, reminding of the theory of multiple intelligences. The author emphasis the importance of the context in which the text is read, the literature being defined by a complex, non-objective and circumstantial relationship between the material existence, extrinsic to the reader, and the cognitive experience (intrinsic): „It means that all of our experiences, knowledge, beliefs and wishes are involved in and expressible only through patterns of language that have their roots in our material existence" (Stockwell 2002: 5).

## 2. The evolution of cognitivism. A definition of the cognitive poetics

The last three decades have targeted the progressive development of the linguistic schools, putting into practice their research methods concerning the language used in the context of the richness of cultural knowledge that it encodes and of the emotional and esthetic potential that it owns. The movement of the iconicity has brought in foreground the crucial interface between perception and language (for example, Bybee 1985; Haiman 1985). Following the reference books: *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* ( Fauconnier, 1985), we find out that afterwards appeared three influent works during the same year (Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987 and Langacker 1987).

The cognitive linguistic has contributed to the amplification and clarification of an anchoring language in the field, keeping in mind the mental, corporal, social and environmental context. Classical and semiotic terms, as the categories, metaphors, iconicity and style, have been critically and radically evaluated, redefined in a way that brings in foreground new terms, s the mental space, conceptual metaphor, prototypes and the worlds of the text, just to mention a few.

The cognitive poetics represents an epistemological method of great magnitude nowadays, applicable in literary and mediatic studies, that explore new intellectual resources. It could be defined as a multidisciplinary paradigm emergent in self, in the sense that it gets inspiration from



BDD-A29616 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:59:00 UTC)

cultural and social psychology, especially the psychology of emotions and the semiotic of affections. The roots of this movement in the literary studies could be found in previous approaches that have been focused on the reader's response, but its applicability domain and the depth have been widened and renewed during the cognitive revolution (*sémiotique des passions*) and the theory of iconicity.

### 2.1. Cognitive markers: the reader, the sense, the context, the metaphor, the metonymy, the world of the text

This is why the cognitive poetics proves its complexity, validating a broader perspective in relation to the literary interpretation, focusing the critic's/receptor's attention (double hypostasis) not only on the author and text, but also on reader (even the critic/receptor), identifying itself with this one in the perception of the text. An eloquent example is the cognitive stylistic (part of the cognitive poetics) that supposes the analysis of the cognition effects on the narrative structure of the text from the mental reception perspective of the reader. Gerard Steen, Joanna Gavins and Johnnathan Culler (1975) show that the role of the cognitive poetics is that of explaining the sense (*condition of meaning*) as a preamble of literary interpretation. The conditions of meaning cause effects on the reader's mind. In this context, the metaphor and metonymy exceed the ornamental mark of the language/expression to rediscover themselves in the social, empiric, subjective ontos of the reader, becoming conceptual structures (*we live by*) as the fore mentioned renown researchers in the domain consider, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson: „We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 3).

At the level of the text, the metaphor connects two representative worlds, two fields of the ontological experience, confronting the author with the reader (from a social-cultural and empiric perspective), beyond the prerogatives of figure of speech and becoming a cognitive concept: „Conceptual metaphor typically projects experientially basic categories onto more abstract ones. Such categories are not ontologically but cognitively basic: typically, they neither denote ultimate constituents of reality not are they without internal structure" (Semino apud Gavins, Steen, 2003: 100).

In exchange, the metonymy „allows the speakers to have mental access to an element through another element, in a relation with the first, and the relationship with the conceptual system is conventional" (Kövecses 2006: 130). The metonymy, as well as the metaphor participates in a process both cognitive and cultural, whose role is that of conceptualizing the experience not just of decorating aspects of the empiric ontos. In contrast to the metaphor, the metonymy is realized in one field of the experience.

The cognitive poetics places the reader in the center of interest of the literary studies, redefining the human relationship with the reality, starting from the premise that each act of cognition/perception is an act of interpretation. Thus, the subjective critic ensures the reader with a pertinent understanding of his affective life, the influence of the text being not just a study/knowledge of it, but also a self-knowledge. The reading became self-reflection for the reader: "the work itself wouldn't exist unless it was read" (Bleich 1975). Horatius related himself to the theory of the literary text reception two thousand years ago: *Multaque pars Mei vitabit Libitinam*. How? By the reading feedback! The reader relates on a subjective level (meaning the perception, the affections, the mental associations, the imagistic thinking scheme) of the text. Whether it be a "committed reader" (Iser), a "model reader" (Eco) or an "ideal reader" (Culler), the theories regarding the perception of the text from the cognitive poetics perspective displace the authority of the work of art, by substituting it for the receptor, that introduces an "added value of meaning"



BDD-A29616 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:59:00 UTC)

through "the initiative of the interpretation, even if it usually wishes to be interpreted with a sufficient guarantee of univocal. A text needs somebody to help it work" (Eco 1991: 83)[1].

The world of the text/speech and the world of objective reality become complementary domains and the cognitive poetics corroborates the intrinsic methods in an interdisciplinary paradigm for understanding the interdependence between cognition, experience and language. Thus, the world's construction is organized by intellectual-cognitive cutouts named domains, categories, spaces, structures, disciplines.

## 2.2.Mental space and metaphorical blending

A life space could be cognitively characterized through the mediation of the mental map induced by these cutouts and through evaluations concerning the frequency, the quality and interactions of such cutouts: „mental space theory is part of cognitive linguistics, and aims to account for the online production and comprehension of language. One of its central claims is that text processing involves the incremental construction of networks of interconnected mental spaces" ( Semino apud Gavins, Steen 2003: 89). These mental spaces are separated, but they could be ingested forming blends as Fauconnier and Turner, Craig Hamilton, Elena Semino declare: „A fundamental purpose of analogy is reinforcement of the generic space, the mental space providing common ground between domains that serve as inputs into the blend" (Craig Hamilton apud Semino, Culpeper 2002: 10). From this perspective, the mental constructions drift from both logical operations, acts endowed with inner harmony and external coherence, and "conceptual blends" of elements coming from different sources (*mental inputs)*.

The conceptual blending is present in many ares of cognition and action. Turner and Fauconnier propose their own conceptual blend, prefacing another relevant concept, that of the cognitive space. The metaphor, from the cognitivists' perspective, Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, exemplify a conceptual blend and they transfer a construct from a conceptual domain (*source)* to another (*target)*. „Metaphorical blending should not be seen as replacing but as extending the concept of a cross-domain mapping. Instead of two domains it posits (at least) four mental spaces, two or more of which, in a metaphorical blend, function as source(s) and target" (Gavins, Steen 2003: 110). The problem of the cognitive patterns could hide from our mental sight phenomena that pertain to the many-space pattern. It is important to emphasis that the conceptual metaphor represent a useful construct to explain a metasememic transfer: „The connection between vision and intellection on the one hand, and touch and emotion on the other, is seen as the foundation for important conceptual metaphors structuring in great detail our vocabulary to do with intellectual and emotional processes respectively" (Semino, Culpeper 2002: 53).

Both the cognitivist researchers' studies and the philosophy of the revelatory metaphor (Blaga) is folding around the new acceptation of the theory of the referential. In a traditional alternative, a reference system is similar to a conceptual domain; in the last decades' vision a reference system is more than a conceptual static domain, because it evokes a dynamic mental space, that moving the accent from a given static structure to emotion or experience. The mental spaces are generated every time we use the language or the thinking. The two human privileges are interconnected and could be modified any time, during the speech: „A mental space is a (relatively small) conceptual packet built up for purposes of local understanding and action. Mental spaces are constructed whenever we think and talk. They are interconnected, and they can be modified as discourse unfolds" (Fauconnier 1994: 5).

## Conclusions

[1] " inițiațiva interpretării, chiar dacă, de obicei, dorește să fie interpretat cu o garanție suficientă de univocitate. Un text vrea ca cineva să-l ajute să funcționeze" (cf. Eco 1991: 83, trad. Marina Spalas).



BDD-A29616 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:59:00 UTC)

The cognitive poetics studies the capacities and predilection to abstracting (coming from the structure of our body and its movement through space) both our linguistic system and our conceptual system as cognitive beings. Meaning that, it leaves in approaching from the literary text and not from the literary theory or ideology and combines the study of the idiosyncratic examples with the study of the abstract conceptual structure, watching how distinct metaphoric structures and particular uses reveal the conceptual universe of an author, character or even a literary critic (seen as the receptor). The cognitive poetics owns an amplified explanatory potential and studies problems connected to mind, creativity, conceptual worlds, (in)compatibilities between the imagistic schemes[2] at the level of the literary text, ambiguity and (un)determination projected by the structure of the text itself.

Cognitivist linguist and researchers in neuroscience have made visible the finalities of this type of critic analysis, emphasizing mostly the impressionability force of the word over the reader, the role o the emotion in knowledge, in developing the identity and self and in the experience of reading, the way I which our self/identity/ subjectivity is always involved and recreated in every act of cognitive knowledge, the essential role that the language and literature play in our manner of being and thinking.

This way, we hold the possibility to deepen the role of the study in the linguistic structure, the role of literature not just in supplying of a cultural knowledge, but especially in the active process of creation and recreation of identity, to the priceless benefits of reading ( as act/process of living) that allows the receptors from all cultural environments to become sensitive to the power of the word and gives them the opportunity to find their own affective, cognitive, imaginative resources and also their own preoccupations and genuine motivations. The receptor of the text/speech uses cognitive processes specific to any human being (encoding, storage, decoding, recovery) conducted in a complex imagistic process: the neuromorphic cognitive systems (Qiang Yu, Huanjin Tang, 2017) own learning, memory, encoding functions. The functional-cognitive space offers a constructional pattern, based on a linguistic and interdisciplinary research, on extensive reasons, at a cognitive, communicative, pragmatic and social-cultural level. All these understandings could reshape the educational process during the entire life.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bleich, David, 1975, „Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism", National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Illinois.

Culler, Jonathan, 1975, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, Routledge Classics, Revised edition 2002, London.

Eco, Umberto, 1991, *Lector in fabula*, translation by Marina Spalas, Univers, Bucharest.

Fauconnier, Gilles, Lakoff, George, Sweester, Eve, 1994, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language*, University Press, Cambridge.

Fauconnier, Gilles, Turner, Mark, 2008, The Origin of Language as a Product of the Evolution of Modern Cognition. In Origin and Evolution of Languages: Approaches, Models, Paradigms, Bernard Laks, ed., Equinox. Retrieved May 10, 2009; http://ssrn.com/abstract*1556533 (consultat 15.06.2018).

Gavins, Joanna, Steen, Gerard (eds.), 2003, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London, New York.

[2] The concepts of imagistic scheme and corporality were generated by the researchers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their work *Philosophy in the flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999) and they aroused numerous criticism sustained by the representatives of the Research Centre from Lund (J. Zlatev, E. Itkonen, G. Sonesson), but also M. Tomasello.



BDD-A29616 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:59:00 UTC)

Iser, Wolfgang, 1978, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore

Kövecses, Zoltán, 2006, *Language, Mind, and Culture. A Practical* Introduction, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Lakoff, George, Johnson, Mark, 2003, (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London.

Semino, Elena, Culpeper, Jonathan (eds.), 2002, *Cognitive Stylistics. Language and cognition in text analysis*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, Philadelphia.

Stockwell, Peter, 2002, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, Routledge, London.

Yu, Qiang, Tang, Huanjin, Hu, J., Tan, K.C., 2017, *Neuromorphic Cognitiv Systems: A Learning and Memory Centered Approach*, 1 st ed., Intelligent Systems Reference Library 126, Springer.



BDD-A29616 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:59:00 UTC)