

Research Article

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Antonio Pamies*

The Concept of Cultureme from a Lexicographical Point of View

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Abstract: Culturemes can be described as extra-linguistic cultural symbols, which behave like metaphorical models, motivating figurative expressions in language (lexical or phraseological). The development of this concept in theoretical research on polysemy and phraseology shows that it can be an effective tool for organizing the representation of semantic networks of figurative meanings, according to culture-based associations of ideas.

Keywords: cultureme, linguo-culturology, figurative meaning, metaphor, phraseology, phraseography, lexicography

1 Polysemy and culturemes

Traditionally, dictionaries present the various senses of a polysemic word as a static list of unconnected meanings. This does not match the reality of the mental lexicon, where figurative meanings are linked to each other by motivated relations (metonymic, metaphoric, or both), which can even follow systematic patterns of analogy. Apresjan (1974b) states that polysemy is a dynamic phenomenon. He defines *regular polysemy* as follows:

Polysemy of the word *A* with the meanings a_i and a_j is called *regular* if, in the given language, there exists at least one other word *B* with the meanings b_i and b_j , which are semantically distinguished from each other in exactly the same way as a_i and a_j , if a_i ; b_i and a_j ; b_j are non-synonymous (Apresjan 1974b:16).

For example, the antonymy between *rich*₁ (“having a lot of money and possessions”) and *poor*₁ (“having little money and few possessions”) is maintained between *rich*₂ (“having or supplying a large amount of something”) and *poor*₂ (“having or supplying a very small amount of something”), as in *this fruit is rich in vitamins ≠ this soil is poor in lime content*. Therefore, lexical implication rules would generate derived lexical meanings from basic lexical meanings.

This applies also to many collocational components. For example, the literal meanings of sp. *ganar* (“to win”) and *perder* (“to lose”) oppose each other by an antonymy which is maintained when they are components of light verb collocations, such as sp. *ganar tiempo* (‘win time’ “save time”) vs. *perder tiempo* (‘lose time’ “waste time”), therefore the meaning of one is predictable from the other. Besides, both belong to a wider network of metaphors derived from a mental model (or *archi-metaphor*), labelled as TIME IS A POSSESSION, which motivates also other verbal images, such as *tener tiempo* (‘have time’), *dar tiempo* (‘give time’), *robar tiempo* (‘steal time’), *malgastar tiempo* (‘squander time’); *ahorrar tiempo* (‘spare time’), *encontrar tiempo* (‘find time’). English has more verbs derived from the same model, *spend time*, *buy time*, *borrow time*, *invest time* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Proverbs such as eng. *time is money* or sp. *el tiempo es oro* (‘time is gold’) belong to the same *archi-metaphor*. Therefore, these semiotic associations are neither

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*Corresponding author: Antonio Pamies, University of Granada Granada, Spain, E-mail: antonio.pamies@gmail.com

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arbitrary nor static. Of course, it might be argued that, since the same model existed in Latin (e.g. Titus' *diem perdidit*), it could have been taken over by several European languages. However, in this case, the fact that very similar metaphors were coined long ago in Chinese¹ seems to discard such hypothesis: *yǒu shí jiān* 有时间 'have time'; *gěi shí jiān* 给时间 'give time'; *yíng dé shí jiān* 赢得时间 'earn time'; *làng fèi shí jiān* 浪费时间 'waste time'; *tōu le shí jiān* 偷了时间 'steal time'; *zhǎo shí jiān* 找时间 'look for time' (Lei, 2017b).

One of the factors of this *regular* polysemy is cultural symbolism, which motivates a great number of metaphorical relations. According to the Neo-Humboldtian *linguo-culturological* school of phraseologists (i.e. Teliya, 1996; Dobrovól'skij, 1998; Szerszunowicz, 2009a, 2010; Kovshova, 2013; Zykova, 2013, 2014, 2015, among others), language and culture are two superimposed semiotic codes which interact, especially by means of figurative meanings and phraseologisms, as "...special signs that can store and accumulate a rather significant amount of cultural knowledge and reflect through their images peculiar ways of national (or culture-bound) worldview of reality" (Zykova, 2016: 135).

In order to approach this phenomenon in a more systematic way, we have proposed the metalinguistic concept of *cultureme*, which is the minimal unit of the interface between both codes. Culturemes can be described as extra-linguistic cultural symbols, which behave like metaphorical models, motivating figurative expressions in language (lexical or phraseological) (cf. Pamies, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

The use of this term is relatively recent among phraseologists (Pamies, 2007; Luque Durán, 2009; Luque Nadal, 2009; Szerszunowicz, 2011, 2014b; Kut'eva, 2016; Mellado, 2015a: 164), and it aims to replace more fuzzy concepts such as *cultural connotations* (Teliya et al., 1998), "national cultural connotations" (*культу́рно-национальные коннотации*) (Teliya, 1996a); *cultural symbols* (Piirainen, 1998), *symbols* (Dobrovól'skij & Piirainen, 2005), *emblems* (Langlotz, 2006), *culturally-bound idioms* (Sabban, 2007, 2008), *stereotypical image-etalons* or "ethno-cultural specificity of verbalization" (*этнокультурная специфика вербализации*) (Kut'eva, 2014)².

The proper term *cultureme* was taken from translatology (Vermeer, 1983; Nord, 1984; Oksaar, 1988; Even-Zohar, 1998), which in turn had borrowed it from non-verbal communication theory (cf. Szerszunowicz, 2014, 2014b). However, our conception is much more restricted than in translation studies, where this term is applied to any kind of "cultural reference" (e.g. Hurtado, 2001) or "culture-marker" (Nord, 1984), mixing into a large and vague category of entities such as *realia*, *cultural gaps*, *culturally loaded words*³, *cultural key words*⁴; *intertextual polyphony*⁵, etc.

Assuming that "...linguo-culturological analysis can reveal the foundations of (...) the intermediary between linguistic and cultural competence of native speakers" (Kržišnik, 2016: 204), such an analysis will need a metalinguistic minimal unit. According to our restrictive definition, culturemes involve only idiomatic meanings, whose literal referent had previously a symbolic function "outside" language. It is a kind of intersemiotic code shifting (from non-linguistic knowledge towards language). For example, the laurel as a cultural symbol of success and glory necessarily precedes lexical metaphors such as eng. *to rest on one's laurels*. The assumption that cultural symbols precede culturemes is relevant only from a diachronic point of view, whereas, synchronically, there is a permanent feedback between culture and language. Just as language universally mediates culture and mind, helping enable them in all human groups, so too it appears to play a role in producing cultural and mental diversity (John Lucy, 2005: 307).

The number of culturemes is difficult to quantify and is probably in the thousands. Though they may be opaque, culturemes constitute a shared knowledge, generating implicit allusions to customs, prejudices, religion, mythology, superstitions, historical facts, famous characters (real or fictional), agriculture, hunting, fishing, livestock, trade, folk medicine, colors, fine arts, literature, songs, gastronomy, clothing, artistic creations, games, sports, etc. (cf. Teliya et al., 1998; Dobrovól'skij & Piirainen, 2005: 214-215; Luque Durán, 2007, 2009; Piirainen, 2015). However, a more accurate description of culturemes needs also to define what they are not, as it will be discussed in the following sections.

1 A language whose European borrowings are only a recent phenomenon (Qiao Yun, 2017).

2 Zykova (2016: 138) quotes other terms such as *quasi-symbols*, *quasi-prototypes* and *quasi-stereotypes*.

3 cf. Galisson (1991).

4 cf. Wierzbicka (1992, 2008) and Goddard (2009).

5 cf. Ducrot (1972).

2 Culturemes are not mere symbols

All culturemes are symbols but not all symbols are culturemes. If we have a look at a Dictionary of Symbols⁶, we can see that many of the listed symbols did not become culturemes. For example, in Spain, justice is commonly represented in paintings, sculptures, cartoons, etc., as a woman with a balance in her hands and a bandage on her eyes (following the ancient symbolic images of the Greek Goddess *Themis*). However, in the Spanish language, the “bandage on the eyes” represents self-deception (*llevar una venda en los ojos* ‘to have a bandage on one’s eyes’ “to be unable to understand an obvious truth because of prejudices or self-deception”; *quitarse la venda de los ojos* ‘to take out the bandage from one’s eyes’ “not to fool oneself anymore”).

3 Culturemes are not mere words

As pointed out by Elizabeth Piirainen (1998), *cultural symbols* maintain an independent value when integrated into the linguistic paradigm of idioms. For example, the Spanish idiom *cortarse la coleta* (‘to cut one’s ponytail’) means “to retire from a profession”; its underlying cultureme is not the explicit ponytail but the implicit “script” which motivates this metaphor, which is the *corrida* (‘bullfighting’). The traditional outfit of the bullfighters includes a small ponytail, that they cut when they retire. Now, the idiom *cortarse la coleta* is also extended to other activities (‘to give up a hobby’ or ‘to drop out of an addiction’). Dozens of other Spanish metaphors are based on the *corrida* cultureme although this word does not appear in their linguistic formulation (cf. Luque; Manjón, 1998; De la Fuente, 2009).

Idiom variation can be used as a test, to isolate the symbolic core. Though fixedness should block lexical substitutions, when a given component corresponds to a cultural taboo, this component may be replaced by another word with a different meaning, with no modifications to the idiom’s global sense. E.g., in sp. *estar hasta los cojones* (‘to be until the testicles’ = “to be fed up”), whose anatomical name (*cojones*) can be replaced by a synonym (*estar hasta los huevos / los cataplines / los pelendengues / las pelotas*), because the symbolic function belongs to the referent, not to the word. If this component is replaced by a euphemism, the taboo disappears, because the “new” referent does not have this symbolism (*estar hasta las narices* ‘to be until the nose’; *estar hasta la coronilla* ‘to be until the crown of the head’; *estar hasta el gorro* ‘to be until the hat’; *estar hasta el moño* ‘to be until the bun’). However, if the referent is replaced by another one, which is not a synonym but is also “forbidden”, the taboo remains; as in eng. *don’t give a damn* > *don’t give a shit* > *don’t give a fuck*, where the blasphemy is replaced by other culturemes with similar values (scatology, sexuality). As pointed out by Luque Durán & Sikánova (1995: 230): “...it is not the word that is configured in different ways in two different languages, but the “symbolism of the object”, which is so radically different....”

4 Culturemes are not lexical gaps

Contrary to *realia* (e.g., rs. *vodka*, *balalaika*; sp. *flamenco*, *paella*, it. *pizza*, *gondola*, ar. *khaima*, *chador*; jap. *sushi*, *kamikaze*; *geisha*; chn. *mah-jong*, *kung fu*), whose referents are lexical gaps in all the other languages because their original referent existed only in one country (cf. Baranov; Dobrovól’skii 2009: 258-262; Szerzunowicz 2015: 104), the literal referent of a cultureme may exist in many places. For instance, the culturemes rs. *береза* and chn. *lián huā* 蓮花 are not lexical gaps (eng. *birch tree*, *lotus flower*; sp. *abedul*, *flor de loto*; fr. *bouleau*, *fleur de lotus*, etc.)⁷. There is no direct relation between *realia* and culturemes, however, nothing prevents *realia* from becoming besides culturemes, if their literal referent has also an extralinguistic symbolic function. It is the case of many gastronomic items existing only in one country, which also symbolize other abstract entities such as survival, goodness, poverty, etc. (Monteiro, Pamies; Lei 2015; Pinnavaia 2015). It is also the case of many bullfighting terms which are *realia* in their literal meaning, but derivations from the *corrida* cultureme in their figurative use.

⁶ e.g. Eberhart (1932); Cirlot (1969); Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1993).

⁷ Cf. Pamies; Tutáeva (2010); Lei (2015).

Realia are defined in relation to other languages, while culturemes are intra-linguistically active, but when a *realium* is at the same time a cultureme the translation difficulties increase⁸. On the other hand, all realia are lexical gaps into other languages, but not conversely. The English word *churchgoer* (“person who assiduously goes to church”) is a *lexical gap* in Polish (Szerszunowicz 2015: 108), and also in Spanish⁹, but it is not a *realium*, since this kind of people are abundant in Spain and Poland.

5 Culturemes are not cultural key-words

According to Galisson’s (1991, 1995) theory of *lexiculture*, some words are *untranslatable* no matter if their referent exists in other language, just because they are “culturally loaded” (*mots à charge culturelle partagée*), i.e., they convey ethno-specific connotations in a cultural community, more or less “hidden” into their lexical meaning. The same applies to the concept of *cultural keywords* (Wierzbicka, 1992; Goddard, 2009; Qiao Yun, 2015), used to analyze lexical items with complex meanings deeply rooted in local culture, such as eng. *reasonably, fair-play, hooligan*; fr. *charme; esprit; raison*, sp. *castizo, honra, picaresca, chulería, escaqueo*; prt. *saudade; malandro, jeitinho*, which convey an implicit world-view embedded in their meaning, so they are particular to a given tradition. E.g. chn. *dào* (道) “way” has many abstract and subjective meanings, which do not exclude each other in real use: “virtue”, “teaching”, “doctrine”, “logos”... (Qiao Yun, 2015: 133). Fernando Pessoa wrote that only Portuguese people may feel *saudade*, because they have this word to speak about it¹⁰. An accurate description of its meaning should explain, for example, its difference with “nostalgia”: is it a pain, a pleasure, or both? Under which circumstances do Portuguese people feel it?

At first glance, they seem perfectly translatable; however, text corpora show the specificity of such “false friends”. For example, in Spanish, the word *chapuza* designates a “botched job”, or a “shoddy piece of work”, so its French equivalents seem obvious: *bâclage /bidouillage* (Pamies, 2008). However, a look on the Internet finds thousands of occurrences where the adjacent adjectives are *española, hispánica, hispana, nacional*, etc. (i.e. ‘Spanish botched job’), while their supposed equivalents in French never connect such concept to a given nation, not even Spain, not to mention France (*Ibid.*). This somehow deterministic association between inefficiency and one’s own homeland is a specifically Spanish cultural feature, which is totally absent in French national stereotypes: Spaniards see themselves as *chapuceros*. Therefore, *chapuza* is a Spanish “cultural key word”, but it is not a cultureme, because these connotations are anchored in the meaning of the word itself, not in a pre-existing extra-linguistic symbolism.

6 Culturemes are not necessarily ethno-specific

In spite of their dependence on local culture, nothing prevents culturemes from being shared by several languages, since the limits of linguistic communities do not necessarily match the cultural ones: “... *underlying fragments of text and world knowledge, being fixed in the lexical structure of idioms, can have been widespread before they turned into idioms*” (Piirainen, 2015: 33). An obvious example is the case of mythological and biblical symbols, generating the same idiom in many languages (Zholobova, 2005, 2011; Luque Nadal, 2010; Pascual, 2012; Piirainen, 2015; Mellado, 2015b)¹¹.

⁸ E.g. In this untranslatable example. speaking about politics, there are three metaphors from the corrido cultureme, whose referents, besides, are realia: *Yo, si fuera Pizarro, no habría entrado en el coso de la política ni para torear ni para ser toreado...* (Antonio Gala, 2008, apud. De la Fuente, 2009: 152).

⁹ In Spanish, its partial equivalents (*beato, meapilas*) are derogatory, which is not the case of eng. *churchgoer*.

¹⁰ *Saudades só portuguesas /Conseguem senti-las bem, /Porque têm essa palavra /Para dizer que as têm.*

¹¹ For example, the idea of being punished for the sins of others” is symbolized by a goat in many languages, as a direct influence of the Bible: gr. ἀποδιοπομπαίος τράγος = lat. *caprus emissarius* = eng. *scapegoat* = sp. *chivo expiatorio* = grm. *Sundenbock* = rs. *козел отпущения* = fr. *bouc émissaire* = pt. *bode expiatório* = it. *capro emissario* = rmn. *țap ispășitor*. The Bible related in its turn a previous fact. Ancient Jews really punished a he-goat that they abandoned in the desert, in order to made him pay for their sins and chase the evils away (*Leviticus 16:10; 16:18*).

However, a cultureme shared by several languages does not predict that all its underlying metaphors will correspond to each other. The Gospel episode of the arrest, trial, and martyrdom of Jesus Christ (the *Passion*), motivates several “widespread idioms”, such as:

- eng. *the kiss of Judas* = sp. *el beso de Judas* = fr. *baiser de Judas* = grm. *Judaskuss*; rus. *Поцелуй Иуды*) = “a false and treacherous act of friendship”;
- eng. *to wash one’s hands* = sp. *lavarse las manos* = fr. *s’en laver les mains* = it. = *lavarsene le mani* = grm. *sich seine Hände waschen* = rs. *умыть руки* = “to refuse to intervene in order to avoid any responsibility”;
- eng. *to bear one’s cross* = sp. *cargar (con) su cruz* = fr. *porter sa croix* = it. *portare la sua croce* = grm. *sein Kreuz tragen* = rs. *нести свой крест* = “to endure resignedly a harsh situation”.

However, German and Russian do not share the same image as eng. *to cry like a Magdalene* = sp. *llorar como una Madalena* = fr. *pleurer comme une Madeleine* = it. *piangere come una Maddalena* (“to cry exaggeratedly”), although it originates from the same shared knowledge. Therefore, metaphors derived from the same cultureme may coincide only partially between languages. Some other verbal images based on the *PASSION OF THE CHRIST* are more specific to Spanish:

- hacerle la Pascua (a alguien)* ‘to make the Eastern (to someone)’ ‘to harm (someone)’
- más falso que Judas* ‘faker than Judas’ ‘hypocritical’
- en menos que canta un gallo* ‘in less than a rooster sings’ ‘very quickly /very soon’
- hacer una barrabasada* ‘to make a Barrabas-like action’ ‘to make a dirty trick’
- otro gallo cantaría* ‘another rooster would sing’ ‘things would not be so bad’
- rasgarse las vestiduras* ‘to rip one’s clothes’ ‘to be very shocked’
- ir de Herodes a Pilatos* ‘to go from Herod to Pilate’ ‘to fall from the frying pan into the fire’
- estar hecho un ecce homo* ‘to be made an *ecce homo*’ ‘to be in a wretched state’
- para más INRI* ‘for more INRI’ ‘adding insult to injury’/ ‘making matters worse’
- meterse a redentor y salir crucificado* ‘to enter as a redeemer and to exit crucified’ ‘to try to help other people and to be damaged by them’.

(Pamies & Tutaeva, 2010)

Only some aspects of this phenomenon are predictable. For example, in the Judeo-Christian world, whose funerary rituals require burial, the *VULTURE* is a symbol of greed, egoism, exploitation, theft, ugliness, disgust, an association of ideas which is common to a certain number of languages:

e.g. English: *vulture fund*; *bank vulture*; *vulture capitalist*; *vulture journalist*; *to circle like a vulture*; *to gather like buzzards at a carcass*; *to fall like vultures on a dying prey*; *to vulture on someone’s back*, *to smell like a buzzard’s nest*, etc. (Pamies et al., 2009).

The vulture is thus a shared *cultureme* with predictable negative values within Judeo-Christian and Muslim cultures¹², even if particular metaphors may differ within this cultural model. For instance, English has *bank vultures*, Italian has ‘vulture lawyers’ (*avvocato avvoltoio*), Serbian has ‘vulture physicians’ (*медијски лешинари*). In Spanish, it is enough to say that someone is a *buitre* (*vulture) to mean that he/she is a greedy and selfish person. However, these metaphors are not likely to be found in the Tibetan language, since the most prestigious funerary ritual of Tibetan culture is the so called

¹² Cf. Spanish: *periodista buitre*; *periodista carroñero*; *buitrear a alguien*; *buitrear a la novia* [de alguien] *rondar como un buitre*; *acechar como un buitre*; *lanzarse como un buitre*; *caer como zopilote*; *acudir como buitres a la carroña*; *ser más fea que un buitre cagando*. French: *s’acharner comme un vautour* (/sur le malheur); *journaliste charognard* / *journaliste vautour*; *fixer d’un oeil de vautour*; *tourmoyer* (/rôder) *comme un vautour*; *battre du bec comme un vautour*; *s’abattre comme un vautour* [sur qqch.]; *puer comme un vautour*. Italian: *giornalista avvoltoio*; *avvocato avvoltoio*; *avvoltoiare*; *volteggiare come un avvoltoio*; *essere furbo come un avvoltoio*; *lanciarsi* (/fiondarsi) *come un avvoltoio*; *come gli avvoltoi sulle carogne*; *avere un alito da avvoltoio*. Russian: *как стервятник*; *инвестор-стервятник*. Serbian: *biti pravi lešinar*; *lešinariti*; *medijski lešinari*; *kružiti kao lešinar*; *obilaziti kao lešinar nad strvinom*; *obletati kao lešinar*; *vrebati kao lešinar*; *obrušiti se kao lešinar*; *kao strvinar na lešinu*; *napasti kao strvinar leš*. German: *wie die Geier auf etwas warten*; *wie die (Aas)geier über jemanden herfallen*; *des Geiers Schatten sein*; *wenn du ein Geier bist, so pass’ aufs Aas*; *wo der Geier will einziehen, müssen die Tauben fliehen*; *wenn der Geier stirbt, weinen die Hühner nicht*; *was der Geier einmal in seinen Klauen hat, das lässt er nicht los*. Jordan Arabic *yahum mithil al’uqab*; *ihntat mithil al’uqāb*; *mithil tuyur al’uqāb alqabiha walbašī’a* (Pamies et al., 2009).

‘sky burial’, in which human corpses are placed on a mountain top, to decompose or to be eaten by scavenger birds¹³.

7 Some psycholinguistic implications

One of the problems of defining *cultureme* is that the concept of “associated ideas” seems rather fuzzy. This term was coined by John Locke, who described them as “...ideas that have no kinship in themselves come to be so strongly linked in some men’s minds that it is very hard to separate them” (1690, vol.2. XXIII/5). David Hume added later that there are evident “...connexions between the different thoughts or ideas of the mind (...) with a certain degree of method and regularity” (1748 [2005: 12]). Psychology has converted this concept into a method of investigation of individual thinking and memory (e.g. Bourdon, 1893), guessing that free associations of ideas would reveal unconscious aspects of the patient’s personality (e.g. Freud, 1899). Literary criticism has also investigated this topic, from the point of view of creative flashbacks, metaphors and metonymies (Quintana, 2016). For instance, Foucault (1966: 63-64) describes madness as the ability of perceiving “wild similarities” (*ressemblances sauvages*) referring to the association of ideas between giants and windmills by *Don Quijote*. But the relevance of such “original” association implicitly presupposes the existence of associations which would be “collective”. Since the latter is less accessible to verification, our hypothesis is that language, especially figurative language, can be an excellent witness of their existence. Metaphors, either as a process or as a result (Brisard, 2000), either as a direct *conceptual mapping* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) or as a *conceptual blend* (Turner & Fauconnier, 2000), are, by definition, an associative phenomenon, and there is no reason to expect, a priori, that they correspond to only one kind of association.

Not all the metaphoric models are “cultural”, since they can be based on the perception of certain physical attributes or phenomena, as in the *conceptual metaphors* described by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). As an example, Mellado mentions the similarity between sp. *buscar algo con lupa* (‘to look for something with a magnifying glass’), and grm. *etwas mit der Laterne suchen* (‘to look for something with a lantern’), both applied to “very scarce things”, can be considered as realizations of the same mental model SCARCE IS LITTLE (2015b: 389). But a great amount of the knowledge linking literal and figurative meanings is created and transmitted within the limits of a given culture (Dobrovol’skij, 1998, 2007; Piirainen, 1998, 2008; Sabban, 2007, 2008). Each linguistic community inherits unconscious memories of cultural associations through its language, embedded into the relation between literal and figurative. As Peggy Lee remarks: “...not only does culture integrally include much that is linguistic, but we, as individuals, are also significantly enculturated through language and cannot easily thereafter separate process from product” (2007: 488). Phraseology is a privileged field to investigate this interaction, especially from a cross-linguistic point of view¹⁴.

Let’s take as an example the symbolic network of the HORSE by means of its traces in Spanish metaphors. In a traditional dictionary (e.g. RAE), the figurative senses of the word *caballo* (‘horse’) are almost randomly distributed along many unmatched sub-entries, in spite of the well-known fact that polysemy functions by successive expansions from a previous meaning (Darmesteter, 1894; Bréal, 1897; Ullmann, 1962; Apresjan, 1974). The HORSE is an extra-linguistic symbol in Spanish culture, generating many metaphors *in absentia*. For example, the idiom *ciudadano de a pie* ‘citizen of foot’ means “commoner” or even “plebeian”, contrary to decision-makers, because, in the early days of the Roman Republic, the ruling class was composed by members of the cavalry, the *equites* (plural of *equus*), derived from *equus* “horse”, for they had to ride their

¹³ Cf. “Give My Body to the Birds” (<http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/sky-burial>).

¹⁴ Cf. Investigations on the cultural motivation of figurative language have carried out by Luque Durán; Sikanova 1995; Teliya 1996; Teliya et al. 1998; Dobrovol’skij 1998; Piirainen 1998, 2008, 2011; Zynken, Hellsten; Nerlich 2003; Zynken 2004; Dobrovol’skij; Piirainen 2005; Ferro 2005, 2007; Sevilla; García Yelo 2006; Sevilla 2007; Luque Durán 2007, 2009; Pamies 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016; Szerszunowicz 2005, 2009, 2014, 2015; Luque Toro 2007; Sabban 2007, 2008; Luque Nadal 2009, 2010, 2012; Tutáeva 2009; 2011; Monteiro 2010; Pamies; Tutáeva 2010a; 2010b; Zholobova 2011, 2015; Szyndler 2012; Zykova 2013, 2014, 2015; Pamies, Ghalayini; Craig 2014; Jia Yongshen 2012, 2013; Kovshova 2013; Zykova 2013, 2014, Dal Maso 2013; Kut’eva 2014, 2015; Wu Fan 2014; Pamies; Lei 2014, 2016; Pamies; Craig; Lei 2015; Lei 2015; García-Page 2015; Mellado 2015; Qiao Yun 2015.

own horse in the army. Thus military power and political authority are associated to this animal. The same symbolism explains that *desespear* or *quitar las espuelas* ‘to take the spurs off’ means “to demote”, by analogy with the humiliating rite of knights’ demotion, whereas *tomar las riendas* ‘to take the reins’ means “take power” and *llevar las riendas* ‘to hold the reins’ means “to have full control” / “to be the boss”.

Therefore, the core of this polysemy is not in the meaning of a word but the underlying symbol, structuring the whole cultural script, that we may label as HORSES ARE FOR THE ELITE, FEET ARE FOR THE RABBLE (Pamies, 2015):

[+HORSE]	[+FEET]
-caballero, ‘horseman’ “gentleman” -caballeroso ‘horsemanlike’ “chivalrous”, “respectful”, “polite” -caballerosidad ‘chevalry’ “generosity”, loyalty”, “fair-play”	-ciudadano de a pie ‘citizen of foot’ “commoner” -pedestre ‘pedestrian’ “unrefined” -de poca monta ‘of little riding’ “third-rated”, “mediocre”

Synchronically, the HORSE / FOOT dichotomy may also be connected to the axiological cline (GOOD vs. BAD), inherent in the concepts of *aristocrat* (<gr. ἄριστος “the best”) and *plebeian* (<lat. *plebs/ plebis* “common”), by means of another cultural script ARISTOCRATS ARE GOOD, PLEBEIANS ARE BAD, also attested by other lexicalized metaphors:

[+NOBILITY]	[+PLEBS]
-cortés ‘courteous’ “respectful” / “polite” -noble ‘noble’ “generous” / “loyal”	-villano ‘villein’ “scoundrel” -rústico ‘rural’ “ignorant” -ordinario ‘ordinary’ “coarse”

This expanded semantic network neither corresponds to a *notional field* (since it involves several domains) nor to a *semantic field* (because domains are only partially involved). It is rather a “linguo-cultural field”, made of relationships (lines in Fig. 1) between figurative values (peripheral nodes in Fig.1), and culturemes (central nodes in Fig. 1).

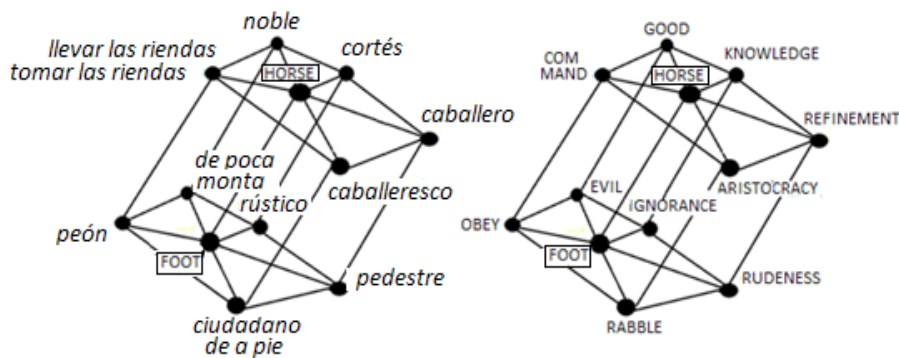


Figure 1 (adapted from Pamies 2016)

Assuming the existence of such links does not presuppose any processing priority or sequential organization of semantic computation and pragmatic inferences, as those investigated by psychologists (e.g. “literal first” vs. “figurative first” vs. “parallel activation” models, in Gibbs, 1994; Brisard, 2000). We just assume

that, once ideas are associated in a lingo-cultural field, linguistic competence may take advantage of it, to produce or understand polysemic sequences.

Through its antonymic relation with FEET, the zoomorphic cultureme of the HORSE may be linked to the somatic cultureme of the HEAD, which also corresponds to power, knowledge, refinement, etc., also opposed to the FEET within a cultural script that we can label THE HEAD COMMANDS, THE FEET OBEY (Pamies, 2015), attested in Spanish language by other metaphors¹⁵.

[+HEAD]	[+FEET]
-caudillo ‘small head’ “chief of war” -capitán ‘head man’ “captain” -cabecilla ‘small head’ “leader of a gang or a revolt” -encabezar ‘to be at the head’ “to lead”	-peón ‘pawn’ “person without any authority” -pensar con los pies ‘to think with one’s feet’ “to be incapable of logical thinking” -quien no tenga cabeza, que tenga pies ‘the one who has no head must have feet’ “we must compensate with physical effort our lack of memory or intelligence”

This secondary connection between culturemes can be represented as in Figure 2:

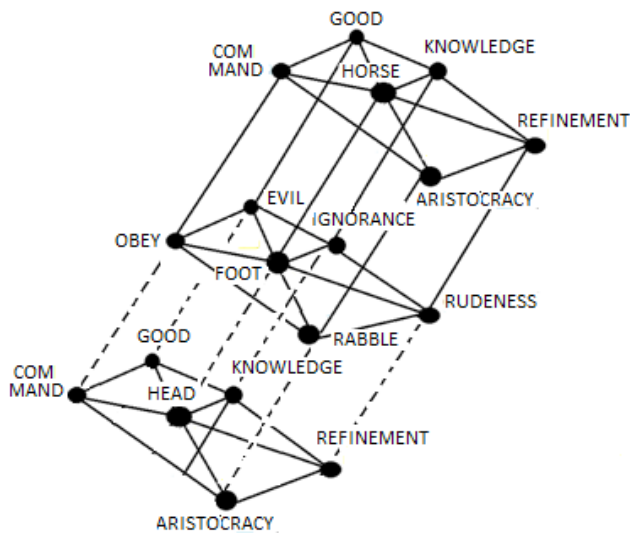


Figure 2

This possibility is recursive, since the enhanced network can be in turn connected to other symbolic oppositions; e.g. Lakoff & Johnson’s *orientational* metaphor UP IS GOOD, DOWN IS BAD, etc. or the opposition between *horse* and *donkey* symbolizing RICHNESS vs. POVERTY, etc.

Cultural motivations may be ignored by speakers (metaphor opacity), but the imperceptibility of a fact does not prove its inexistence: if some metaphors remain obscure it is due to our insufficient knowledge, not to an effective absence of motivation (R. Martin, 1996: 300). The current meaning of sp. *profanar* (“to profane”) is “to dishonor something sacred”, the users do not relate it to its etymological sense: the displacement of a religious image, referring to the abnormal place of still unconsecrated statues (Lat. *pro+fānō*: ‘before the temple’ [Roberts, 2014: 407]). By contrast, in Chinese, *fó tóu jiāo fèn* 佛头浇粪 (‘to smear Buddha’s head with manure’) also means “to treat something sacred without respect” (Ding, 2009: 57), but its motivation remains analyzable and transparent for the speakers. However, in both languages, these concepts may be mapped, with the same function, onto non-religious domains.

¹⁵ This somatic cultureme is linked in its turn to Lakoff & Johnson’s *orientational* metaphor up is good, down is bad (1980: 486).

8 Some lexicographic implications

As pointed out by Raffaele Simone (2014), there is no such a thing as a reference work representing the whole lexical competence. This view on *regular* polysemy, if extended to all the values of all the culturemes, would be a great challenge for lexicology, in general, and phraseology, in particular. The main difference between a dictionary and the native speaker's mental lexicon is the fact that, in the former, the meanings are (more or less) isolated from each other, whereas, in the latter, they are mutually connected by powerful psycholinguistic networks.

The first attempts of culture-based dictionaries are mainly mono-lingual projects, such as the Russian *Идеографический словарь русских фразеологизмов с названиями животных*, by Kozlova (2001), *Русское культурное пространство: лингво-культурологический словарь*, by Brileva et al. (2004), the *Большой фразеологический словарь русского языка*, by Teliya et al. (2006 [2014]), or the Polish *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, which is still ongoing in Lublin, and has published only a small part of the project (Bartmiński, 1996, 1999, 2012; Zynken, 2004). Since multilingualism is now the main priority of phraseography (Colson, 2008), the advantages of such analysis should be used also for the comparison of languages, as in the *Diccionario fraseológico-cultural de la lengua china*, by Jia Yongsheng (2013). However, all these works are still partially semasiological, and not different enough from idiom dictionaries, and their cross-linguistic application poses a number of methodological problems.

Cross-linguistically, three types of relations may be expected from the contrastive analysis of the culturemes of two languages:

- a) *complete coincidence*: both culturemes and have the same values in both languages.
For example, the above mentioned VULTURE has the same values in Spanish and French, even if there are some differences between its particular metaphors (Pamies et al., 2009).
- b) *complete divergence*: either a cultureme exists only in one of the compared languages, or both exist but do not share a single value.
For example, the BIRCH TREE is a cultureme in Russian (Pamies & Tutáeva 2010a, 2010b), but it has no attested symbolic role in Spanish language.
- c) *partial coincidence*: the same symbol works as a cultureme in both languages but they share only part of their values.

For example, the symbolism of LIGHT vs. SHADE shares several values in Spanish and Chinese, where LIGHT symbolizes DIVINE REVELATION, KNOWLEDGE, INTELLIGENCE, SINCERITY, LEGITIMACY, GLORY, HOPE, in both languages, while, symmetrically, DARKNESS symbolizes SIN, IGNORANCE, STUPIDITY, DECEPTION, ILLEGALITY, ANONYMITY, DESPAIR (Pamies & Lei, 2016). We quote here just some of the examples for these values: LIGHT IS KNOWLEDGE, DARKNESS IS IGNORANCE:

- *aclarar / esclarecer* 'to clear' / 'to enlight' "make intelligible";
- *ilustrar* *to illustrate *dar luz* 'to give light' "make intelligible";
- *estar claro / ser transparente* 'to be clear' / 'to be transparent' "to be intelligible";
- *encenderse la bombilla (a alguien)* 'the light bulb turns itself on (to sb.)' "to understand suddenly";
- *jiān tīng zé míng, piān xìn zé àn* (兼听则明, 偏信则暗) 'simultaneously listen then clear, partial believe then dark' "If you listen to both sides, you understand everything, if you only listen to one part, then you will understand nothing";
- *tenebroso / oscuro / opaco* 'gloomy' / 'dark' / 'opaque' "unknown / unintelligible";
- *oscurecer / ofuscar* 'to darken' / 'to obfuscate' "to make things unintelligible";
- *ceguera* 'blindness' "unability to understand";
- *obedecer ciegamente* 'to obey blindly' "to obey thoughtlessly";
- *el amor es ciego* 'love is blind' "people in love are unable to perceive the faults of the beloved person";
- *afición ciega razón* 'fondness blinds reason' "people very fond of something are unable to think rationally", etc. (Pamies; Lei Chunyi 2016);
- *yīn huī* 隐晦 'hide dark' "obscure" / "ambiguous";
- *máng cón* 盲从 'blindly obey' "to obey thoughtlessly";

- *máng hūn* 盲婚 ‘blind marriage’ “marriage between people who do not know each other, under the decision of their parents or a matchmaker”;
- *wén máng* 文盲 ‘character blind’ (blind to read the characters) “illiterate” (*Ibid.*).

However, both languages do not share the value LIGHT IS BIRTH and DARKNESS IS DEATH, which functions in Spanish but not in Chinese.

- *ver la luz* ‘see the light’ “to be born”;
- *alumbramiento* ‘enlightenment’ “labor”;
- *dar a luz / alumbrar* ‘to give at light’ / ‘to enlighten’ “to give birth”;
- *apagarse / extinguirse* ‘to extinguish oneself’ “to die”;
- *especies en peligro de extinción* ‘species in danger of extinction’ “endangered species” (Pamies & Lei, 2016).

We do not find evidence of these values in the corresponding Chinese cultureme, which, has also some other values that are not found in Spanish, such as VACUUM or SOLITUDE:

- *guāng gùn* 光棍 ‘light stick’ (a stick with light) “bachelor” (*Ibid.*).

Linguo-cultural contrast reveals another type of partial coincidence: when a given function is played by different culturemes in several languages. For example, the values of the Spanish symbolism of BREAD, correspond to RICE in Chinese, and to CASSAVA in Brazilian Portuguese (Monteiro, Pamies & Lei, 2015).

In Spain, as in many other European cultures, wheat BREAD symbolizes FOOD, thus, SURVIVAL, by metonymy. This value was attested in the Bible: *con el sudor de tu rostro comerás el pan hasta que vuelvas a la tierra* “with the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (*Génesis* 3:19). Many Spanish metaphors are based on this symbol, such as:

- *ganarse el pan* ‘to earn one’s bread’ “to earn one’s life”;
- *las penas con pan son menos* ‘sorrows with bread are less’ “life is not so sad when there is good food”;
- *pan para hoy, hambre para mañana* ‘bread for today, hunger for tomorrow’ “an apparent solution in a short term, which later will bring a bigger problem”, etc.

In Chinese, this symbolic role is played by *fàn* (饭 ‘cooked-rice’) which also represents FOOD and SURVIVAL, though its metaphors may be quite different:

- *yé gēng niáng fàn* 爷羹娘饭 ‘father rice+porridge mother cooked+rice’ (to eat the rice of one’s parents) “to depend on one’s parents instead of working”;
- *chī ruǎn fàn* 吃软饭 ‘eat soft rice’ “said of a man who does not work but lives on a woman” (*Ibid.*).

Cassava, called *mandioca* in Brazilian Portuguese (<Tupi *mãdi’oca*), became the substitute of wheat bread in Brazil, where it is the base of alimentation, as the main component of *mingau*, *tapioca*, *angu*, *pirão* and *farofa*, all of them made of cassava flour (*farinha*), which, by metonymy, symbolize FOOD and SURVIVAL in this culture (Monteiro, Pamies & Lei, 2015). This role is attested by Brazilian proverbs:

- *não há animação sem pirão* ‘without cassava porridge, there is no activity’;
- *sem farinha ninguém trabalha* ‘without cassava flour nobody works’;
- *sem pirão não há eleição* ‘without cassava porridge, there is no choice’;
- *enquanto houver mandioca e milho cada um cria seu filho* ‘once there is cassava and corn, everyone raises his son’ (Monteiro, Pamies; Lei 2015).

The metaphoric productivity of BREAD, RICE and CASSAVA in these languages is very high¹⁶, but this small sample is enough to illustrate the fact that, cross-linguistically, a common symbolic function may correspond to different culturemes, as a different type of partial coincidence, that should be also taken into account in a multilingual cultural dictionary.

¹⁶ See Monteiro, Pamies; Lei 2015 for complete information.

From a lexicographic point of view, the concept of *cultureme* should give rise to a new kind of repertoire, whose entries would not be verbal forms, but associative relations linking cultural knowledge and figurative meanings. Such an approach would be difficult to achieve, but closer to the mental lexicon of native speakers, whose expanded networks of *associated ideas* fall out of the traditional “atomized” approach of lexicography (Pamies, 2015). This kind of approach is compatible with corpus-based and computational research on the links between culture, society and language.

9 Conclusion

The concept of *cultureme*, in the narrow sense that we propose (cultural symbols which motivate metaphorical models for figurative language), is the core of a linguo-cultural bundle of *values*, attested by *particular metaphors* (lexical or phraseological).

A *cultureme* can be shared, totally or partially, by several languages. From a cross-linguistic point of view, comparing the rationale behind cultural models may help to understand and memorize figurative units. However, the identity of their particular metaphors is not predictable, even within a shared value. *Culturemes* can be an effective tool for the representation of the radial expansions of polysemy, by means of “linguo-cultural fields”, which can, afterwards, be connected between them, enhancing the associative density of their network.

While bilingual idiom dictionaries try to explain or translate particular metaphors, isolated from each other (Mellado, 2015b: 386-388), the cross-linguistic study of *culturemes* aims to compare the conceptual connections of figurative language, ruled by metaphoric models emulating the behavior of native speaker’s mental lexicon.

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