

EMBLEMATIC FORMS AND THE “FLICKERING” OF MEANINGS

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Abstract. The paper deals with the significance of the procedural nature of “flickering” meanings, identifying their functionality in the formation and interpretation of emblematic structures. By integrating visual and verbal signifiers, the emblem attains the status of an image schema, suggesting a semantic volume that it partially reconstructs. Contemporary scholarly interpretations extend the temporal and disciplinary dimensions of “emblematicity”, which, as a conceptual category, have seen a substantial increase in its applicability. This concept appeals to a foundational cognitive mechanism rooted in the coherence between phenomena and noumena, the perceptual background and verbal articulation, and the interplay of iconic and conventional elements in diverse configurations. The emblematic form presents an expanded model of the dialectical and synergetic process, whereby cognitive activity is transformed into semantic experience through verbal-iconic mediation.

Keywords: emblem, meaning, schema, cognition, psycholinguistics, mnemonic mechanics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Highlighting the popularity of emblematics during the Baroque period, which elevated it to the status of “mass literature” (Chyzhevsky, 2003, p. 331), Dmytro Chyzhevskyi emphasizes the unique effectiveness of visual-verbal presentations in encapsulating moral-ethical, philosophical, and psychological axiological frameworks. The attribute of “mass appeal” underscores the universal accessibility of the semiotic model, which is easily interpretable, offering intellectual pleasure within the comprehensible coordinates of iconic-conventional uniformity. Across diverse contexts, it demonstrated its hermeneutic effectiveness, adapting the depth of interpretation to the intellectual horizons of its recipients.

The etymology of the word “*emblem*” originates from the Latin *emblēma* and the Greek *ἔμβλημα*, which initially denoted an “inserted part”, an “inlaid element”, and was associated with the verb *emballō* (to throw in, to insert), signifying a sense of “processuality” and emphasizing “immersion” or “penetration” into a particular structure or phenomenon. By combining visual and verbal signifiers, the emblem achieved the status of an image-schema, hinting at a semantic volume that it partially reconstructs.

The foundation for identifying and typologizing the “emblem” and “emblematicity” lies in the structured “principle” of reference – a semiotic mechanism that relies on the defined interaction of the visual and the verbal, the iconic and the conventional, within meaning-making processes. Such considerations emerge both implicitly and explicitly in the research of scholars such as Peter M. Daly, J. Manning, and E. Spolsky (Daly, 1998; Manning, 2002; Spolsky, 2015). Thus, we can assert the effect of semiotic, epistemological, metaphysical, and cultural extensions of the concept of the “emblem.”

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Contemporary scholars expand the temporal and disciplinary coordinates of the concept of “emblematicity,” significantly increasing its applicability. As a conceptual category, it appeals to a fundamental cognitive mechanism grounded in the coherence of phenomena and noumena, the perceptual background and its verbal articulation, as well as the interaction of iconic and conventional elements in various combinations. These considerations underscore the functionality of emblematic semiosis not only in literary or cultural domains but also in a multidisciplinary context. The emblem is interpreted both as a mnemonic device and as an epistemological operation: image and word serve as two fundamental means of signifying and defining the conscious world, each complementing the other congruently. Consequently, the emblematic “mechanism” might be understood as a form of cognition with features of a method, principle, or mode of intellectual activity that manifests and preserves diverse types of ontological experience.

Classical neuropsychology frequently employs the concept of a “schema” to describe such processes. Here, a “schema” is understood as a kind of standard that identifies receptive reactions. Schemas modify sensory impressions, triggered by incoming sensory impulses so that they incorporate information about the current state in its relationship to the preceding state (Bickerton, 2009, p. 17). In cognitive psychology, a schema refers to a structure that configures receptive data. For instance, U. Neisser equates it to the part of the complete perceptual cycle that is internal to the perceiver, modified by experience, and specifically oriented toward the perceived (Neisser, 1976, p. 73). The functions of schemas are often explained through various analogies: in the context of information acquisition, they may be described as “formats”, while in the context of gathering data about objects and events, they are referred to as “plans”. Other terminological variants also highlight the importance of structural interaction between individual and collective perceptions of form and content in perceptual mechanisms. As Neisser expounds, the perceiver performs an act that incorporates both environmental information and personal cognitive mechanisms (Neisser, 1976, p. 74). Visually perceived objects or phenomena – filtered through the selective emphases of visual reception – are named and internally characterized by the subject (in terms of form and qualities). The emergence and identification of meanings in specific images result from the intricate interplay of external visual stimuli, the social semiotic context, and individual perceptual reflections and interpretations. This process may be described as “emblematic”, given its structural organization and functionality: the subject selectively focuses on external stimuli, highlighting dominant properties and qualities that serve as identifiers for generalized semantic equivalences. Associative mnemonic mechanisms coordinate unique representations, with semantic contents typically relying on the laws of “association of relations and ideas” (Soletskyi, 2022).

Visual sensations contribute to the formation of a distinct visual semantics that concretizes meaning. Through memory, concepts can be detached from their initial (dominant) perceptual context-identifiers and represented independently. Rudolf Arnheim, a leading scholar on the functioning and structural features of visual thinking, observes: the mind can cut pieces from the fabric of memory, leaving the fabric itself unchanged. It can paste together fragments of memory to create centaurs or griffins, mechanically combining pieces of reality (Arnheim, 1954, p. 17-19).

In his studies of the hermeneutic dimensions of “linguistic boundaries”, Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts: every time a speaker searches for the right word to reach their interlocutor, there arises a sense that this word is not entirely appropriate. Always, what one speaker intends to convey bypasses the other, who receives something different through language (Gadamer, 2001, p. 187). One reason for this linguistic differentiation and polysemy resides in the fact that associative visual representations are tied to specific words based on subjective experience, situational variations, and contextual embeddedness. The same word can evoke internal visual representations in different individuals that are shaped by their unique experiences, producing distinct figurative manifestations but a shared background or contour.

This suggests that communicative consensus is not achieved through precise perceptual-associative correspondence or interpretative uniformity, but through a universal schema of agreements that allows for subjective visual variability in identification. Ludwig Wittgenstein compares linguistic expressions to geometric figures (Wittgenstein, 1995), and Roman Jakobson emphasizes that a shared “code” is essential for the effectiveness of a “speech event” (Jakobson, 1971). The issue of “understanding” is closely tied to perception and evaluation, with meaning connected to representation; algorithms, schemas, codes, and frames are all terms for the complex process of reconciling perceptual experience with its verbalization. Thus, the communicative process (in both oral and written forms) can be characterized as emblematic, underscoring the emblematic function within linguistic practice. Verbal signs are merely part of the external expression of meaning reduction, which is linked to internal visualizations. While the verbal sign serves as a shared monotopic element, the subjective representations it evokes are polymorphic.

Numerous scholars have highlighted the fragmentary and selective nature of mnemonic mechanics in psycholinguistic actions. Experiments conducted by Alfred Binet, Kurt Koffka, and Edward B. Titchener provide evidence of the predominance of generalized, indistinct, and schematic visualizations in response to specific verbal stimuli.

Oleksandr Potebnia, in his analysis of the semantics of inner speech, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the “sense” of a word and its “meaning”. French literary scholar Jean Pouillon was among the first to explore this differentiation in the context of literary text creation and hermeneutics, asserting that the “sense of a word” is dynamic and fluid, arising from the complex interplay of situational psychological factors (Paulhan, 2006), while “meaning” represents only one, typically conventionally accepted, aspect of sense. Accordingly, psycholinguistic activity is structurally and functionally divided into presuppositional (anticipatory) processes, which rely on meaning, and postpositional processes, which involve sense shaped by textual context.

This sense formation is emblematic, involving a unique visual-verbal decoding that aligns individual linguistic-imaginative representations with the stylistic features of an author’s textual expression. This dynamic is especially evident in the titles of artistic works. Thus, the concretization and formation of a

text's semantic horizons occur through specific receptive acts and meaning-organizational structures, facilitating the synchronization of individual and collective semantic constants. This phenomenon, described in contemporary philology as the "flickering of meanings" (Kononenko, 2015; Kononenko, & Vorobets, 2023), manifests the deeply rooted visual-verbal unity found even in the earliest semiotic syntheses of language and imagery.

Numerous persistent attempts to classify and systematize the relationships between language and thought, spanning from Plato to deconstruction, confirm this view. In the history of Christian theology – from the time of the Church Fathers to the present – this idea finds its explication. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, the Christian idea of incarnation is closely tied to the problem of the Word (Gadamer, 2000, p. 387). One of the most significant tasks of Christian exegesis and patristics, the interpretation of the mystery of the Trinity, relies on the human relationships between thought and language (Gadamer, 2000, p. 387). The mystery of the unity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is reflected in the phenomenon of language, concentrating new insights into the philosophy and logic of the Word, whose structural and functional properties are interpreted in an emblematic manner. The formulation of theological eidetic concepts unfolds through the inseparable semantic synthesis of visual and verbal signifiers.

The act of creation is accomplished through the Word of God, which becomes both a "process" and a "means" (Gadamer, 2000, p. 388). Verbal articulation, according to exegetical law, is a phenomenon (a "miracle" in Christianity) proportional to the incarnation of God in the flesh of Christ. The principles of consubstantial, reciprocal emanation of the Father and the Son, spirit and word, underscore the emblematic structure and focus of canonical doctrines, and more broadly, of language and thought. Evaluating the "processuality" of the Word in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, Gadamer identifies specific features that confirm the gradual, staged "movement" of constructing the meaning of the Word in thought. "The human word, before being actualized, exists in potential. It lends itself to formation but is not yet formed" (Gadamer, 2000, p. 393). Within the word, the image of the thing is potentially present. Aquinas's well-known comparison of the word to a mirror, in which the object is seen, demonstrates that *verbum* in medieval scholasticism is equated with the imprint or stamp of a thing, whose meanings are born in the structured process of thought. Although the human word is oriented toward an object, it cannot fully contain it as a whole. Therefore, thinking through the word constructs selective, unfinished emblematic forms that are clarified and specified through additional verbal extensions.

Examining the history of the concept of the "Word" across various cultural-historical formations, one observes a continuity and interpretive similarity in defining its functional nature. Thus, it is entirely logical that the Christian understanding of the Word relied on late antique thought, while late scholasticism approached these interpretations through the lens of classical Greek philosophy. Various attempts to classify and structure the Word consistently revolve around its external and internal postures, its semiotic, semantic, and etymological consistencies, which generally reflect different levels of correspondence between the visually observable and the verbally signified. Little wonder that the first idea of a lexical catalog, according to Umberto Eco, was embodied in the form of Porphyry's Tree (Eco, 2014, pp. 8-21), whose name symbolically emphasizes the need for additional visual affirmation of the logic and philosophy of the verbal.

Oleksandr Potebnia, articulating the similarities between language and art, emphasizes that the word is an “embryonic” form of poetry. For the Ukrainian scholar, the concept of the “symbolism” of the word is synonymous with its “inner form” and may be described as the poetic nature of language (Potebnia, 1996). The well-known distinction in verbal structure between external form (articulated sound), content (objectified through sound), and internal form (closest etymological meaning) is analogous to the functional-componential diversity of meanings within an emblem. The triadic matrix of the emblem, which could take various combinatory forms, presupposes a complementary representation of meaning through image and text with differing types of associativity. Consider the diverse emblematic designations associated with the lexeme “tree” – tree of life, divine tree, world tree, tree of the Knights of the Round Table, Noah's tree, alchemical tree, tree of knowledge, Yggdrasil (from T. Percy's writings), tree of philosophy, anthropomorphic tree, and so on. These constructs symbolized ideas of world creation, wisdom, familial or social unity, genealogical kinship, cosmology, the Fall, and human life. Visual constructions of the “tree” can thus be regarded as the “etymological” component of a specific emblematic *eidos*, tying it to primordial visual-semantic representations. These served as the source for the birth of later, more complex and nuanced semantic forms.

The dynamics of meaning formation in the context of receptive-communicative approaches in literary studies are explored by R. Hromiak and S. Lutsak. In their research, the iconic-conventional correlation of verbal creations provides the foundation for a range of interpretive clarifications about the synergetic processes within the artistic and imaginative world, linked to the interplay of objective and artistic realities (Gromyak, 2018), individual and collective, traditional and innovative elements in the historical-literary process. Based on the concepts of O. Eliade and R. Hromiak, Svitlana Lutsak highlights the modeling and structural specificity of the word, which reveals the feasibility of uncovering the essential features of the art of the word through modeling the core within the fluid world of artistic facts, i.e., the unified components of a dynamically ordered ‘material structure’ with levels or interweavings corresponding to its content (Lutsak, 2010, p. 130).

3. CONCLUSIONS

In the reviewed concepts of the “word”, regardless of methodological orientation, historical context, or linguistic, literary, cognitive, or neurophysiological justification, we consistently encounter various forms of structuring the internal relationships, mechanisms, and processes that unfold behind verbal signifiers. The foundational principles of semiotics and structuralism further substantiate this characteristic. The decomposition of linguistic units into “sign, signified (*significat*), and signifier (*signifiant*)” by F. de Saussure (Saussure, 1983), the logical triangle of G. Frege (sign, denotation, concept), the three semiotic triads of C. S. Peirce, R. Barthes’ metalanguage “secondary semiological system”, and the codes and lexicodes of U. Eco are but a partial list of diverse attempts to describe the mechanisms of semantization. Their resemblance to emblematic phenomena is not merely structural.

Despite the traditionally simplified three-component interpretations of the sign and the emblem, they share a distinct “semantic” philosophy and interpretive heuristic potential. The emblem essentially duplicates and details, visualizes, and modifies semiotic mechanisms step by step. Within a broad sense, it presents an expanded model of the dialectical, synergetic process of transforming cognitive activity into semantic experience through verbal-iconic mediation.

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У статті описано вагомість процесуальності «мерехтіння» сенсів, визначено їхню функційність у формуванні та інтерпретуванні емблематичних структур. З'єднуючи в собі візуальні та вербалльні сигніфікати, емблема отримувала статус образу-схеми, що натякає на смисловий об'єм, який вона частково реконструює. Трактування сучасних дослідників розширяють часові та галузеві координати функціонування «емблематичності», що як поняттєва категорія значно збільшує свою вжитковість, адже апелює до фундаментального когнітивного засобу, який опирається на когерентність феноменів та ноуменів, перцептивного фону і його верbalного становлення, іконічної та конвенціональної взаємодії у найрізноманітніших комбінаціях. Емблематична форма презентує розширену модель діалектичного, синергетичного процесу перетворення когнітивної активності через словесно-іконічні опосередкування у семантичний досвід.

Ключові слова: емблема, сенс, схема, когніція, психолінгвістика, mnemonic mechanics.