



Metaphoric semiosis: a Peircean perspective

Semiose metafórica: uma perspectiva peirceana

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Abstract: This article presents how metaphoric semiosis develops from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. The study takes as theoretical framework the general foundations of metaphor as described by classical theories, its recognized cognitive nature and the theory of signs developed by Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) based on his three phenomenological categories. This is on the assumption that the application of Peirce's broad conceptual tools – philosophical and semiotic – to his concept of metaphor as a hypoicon and its subdivisions constitutes an original and dynamic theory of metaphor, capable of operationalizing integrated analyzes of multimodal aspects of metaphor. In conclusion, considerations are made about the truth value of a good metaphor according to Peircean theoretical framework.

Keywords: metaphor; semiotics; meaning; cognition; iconicity; multimodality.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta a forma como se desenvolve a semiose metafórica sob a perspectiva da semiótica peirceana. O estudo toma como quadro teórico os fundamentos gerais da metáfora descritos pelas teóricas clássicas, sua reconhecida natureza cognitiva e a teoria dos signos desenvolvida por Charles S. Peirce com base em suas três categorias fenomenológicas. Parte-se do pressuposto de que a aplicação do amplo instrumental conceitual de Peirce, tanto filosófico como semiótico, a seu conceito de metáfora como hipoícone e suas subdivisões constitui uma teoria original e dinâmica da metáfora, capaz de operacionalizar análises integradas de aspectos multimodais da metáfora. À guisa de conclusão, são tecidas considerações sobre o valor de verdade de uma boa metáfora de acordo com o quadro teórico peirceano.

Palavras-chave: metáfora; semiótica; significação; cognição; iconicidade; multimodalidade.

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The use of metaphors is one of the most fundamental expression skills: metaphorical thinking can be expressed in all forms of human language. Metaphorical signs can be found in verbal, visual and sound semiotic systems, and in their various hybrid manifestations, consigning the multimodal nature of the metaphorical phenomenon, always complex and fruitful. The present paper seeks to present the general foundations of its functioning, its cognitive nature and a Peircean semiotic approach on its multiple facets of iconicity, showing how a comprehensive and integrated understanding of this phenomenon of meaning can be drawn from Peirce's theory of signs and its phenomenological basis, in order to shed light on the paths through which insightful metaphors arise.

1. Fundamentals of the metaphorical process

In the use of verbal language, metaphor means the transposition from proper meaning to figurative meaning and can be understood in two senses, a broad one and a specific one. In general terms, all forms of figurative language have a metaphorical nature and can be considered metaphors in the broad sense. In a strict sense, metaphor designates a specific figure of speech among many others, in which a word or sentence, which usually denotes a type of object or action, is used to designate another object or action, which has something in common with the first, suggesting an analogy between them.

According to Eco (1994, p. 534-535), metaphor in the strict sense can be defined in several ways: as a transfer of the name of an object to another motivated by analogy, as an exchange of an appropriate term for a figurative one or even as an abbreviated similarity between the compared term and the comparative term. There are numberless and diversified theories about the functioning of metaphors in verbal language; however, according to Nöth (1995, p. 128), there are two complementary concepts that substantiate their definition: *transfer* and *similarity*, and all the explanations (linguistic, semiotic, philosophical, psychoanalytic, cognitive, etc.) about metaphorical processes of meaning are based on those two principles.

Theories of metaphor can be divided into theories of *comparison* and of *interaction* (NIKLAS, 1994, p. 544). The comparative approach bases that semantic phenomenon solely on the similarities between its two terms, being fundamentally a paradigmatic perspective, complementary to the concept of substitution (NÖTH, 1995), while the perspective of interaction encompasses, in addition to similarity, the interaction between the two poles united by the metaphorical expression, being considered a predominantly syntagmatic approach, without, however, waiving with the paradigmatic aspects.

The *transfer* applies to every figure of speech and, according to Nöth (1995), it is expressed in the very etymology of the word ‘metaphor’, which is formed by the prefix *metá* (Greek; in the middle of, between; behind, subsequent, after; with, according to, as per; during) plus the noun-forming post-positive *phorá* (Greek), which means the action of taking or carrying forward. According to Houaiss (2001), in classical Greek, the prefix *metá* was already part of words that expressed ideas of interposition, intermediation and change of place or condition. Transfer is a principle of substitution, of translating the meaning from one initial place to another; that is, from one semantic field to another, being observable in any figure of speech, since these two “places” can be considered the original literal meaning and the figurative meaning.

Nöth (1995) further states that *similarity* is the distinctive criterion of metaphors in the strict sense, which seeks to establish a similarity or an implied comparison between ideas connected to two different spheres of meaning. According to Lopes (1986, p. 24-25), metaphor has once been considered an abbreviated comparison, elliptical due to the absence of a comparative particle (for example, “as, like, such, thus, such as, likewise”, etc.). The metaphor, therefore, would be a figure resulting from a comparison between two terms, A and B, considered “improperly” similar to each other; A would then be the term to be defined, the *compared* term, and B, the *comparative* term, which defines it from a common meaning between both. Although poetic language makes extensive use of metaphors, Lopes (1986, p. 24-25) observes that, “as natural languages are systems of signs through which we use something (B) to say another thing (A), they are essentially metaphorical”, and there can be no semiotic system that cannot exercise the metalinguistic function of producing the necessary paraphrases to declare and explain the meaning of another expression. Thus, Lopes explains that,

whenever we translate a certain segment of speech through an unexpected, unfamiliar paradigm, using it instead of the expected paradigm, programmed in our memory, we will be producing a metaphor (which can be subsequently interpreted, by the recipient, as an error or a license, but that does not destroy the metaphorical mechanism itself).

It is not very easy to accept the idea that it is sufficient to suppress the comparative particle of a comparison to create a metaphor. However, that is what seems to actually happen:

Comparison: My heart is like a dumped bucket

Metaphor: ‘My heart is a dumped bucket’ (Fernando Pessoa)
(LOPES, 1986, p. 25, my translation¹)

In other words, metaphors express judgments or reasoning that result from the comparison between two ideas that are connected by means of a similarity or analogy different from those previously established and which have become usual. The similarity between the two related contents is the foundation that accounts for the semantic motivation of metaphors and other figures of speech. As Ducrot (1979, p. 315) observes, “the attribution of a predicate to an object may be presented as a fact, as a possibility, or as a necessity, and logicians then speak, respectively, of categorical, hypothetical, and apodeictic judgments”. Consequently, a metaphor can be considered an attribution of possible predicates to an object by means of a hypothetical judgment, expressed in a figurative manner. For example, if a man demonstrates a great ability to deal with a complex problem, someone who admires this behavior may say: “He is a computer”. This metaphor, which attributes the abilities of a computer (comparative term) to a certain person (compared term), is a hypothesis about his intelligence, since it does not refer to a

¹ In the original: “sempre que traduzirmos um dado segmento discursivo por meio de um paradigma inesperado, pouco familiar, utilizando-o no lugar do paradigma esperado, programado em nossa memória, estaremos produzindo uma metáfora (que poderá ser interpretada, subsequentemente, pelo destinatário, como um erro ou uma licença; mas isso não destrói o mecanismo metafórico em si).

Não é muito fácil aceitar a ideia de que basta suprimir a partícula comparativa de uma comparação para fazer uma metáfora. É isso mesmo, no entanto, que parece ocorrer efetivamente:

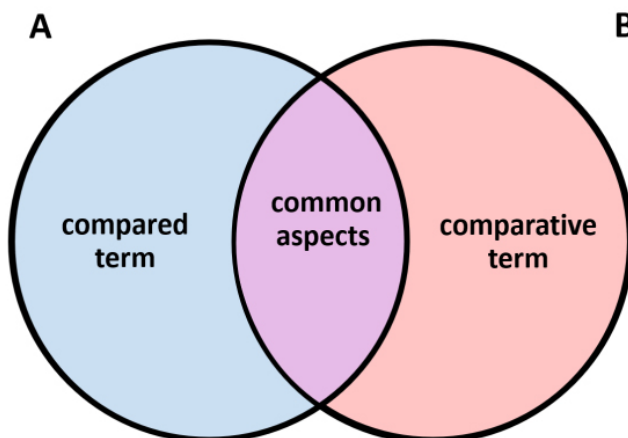
Comparação: Meu coração é como um balde despejado

Metáfora: ‘Meu coração é um balde despejado’ (Fernando Pessoa)”. (LOPES, 1986, p. 25.)

proven fact, nor it is an attribution by necessity. And even though this metaphorical expression were used in reference to someone who was proven to be very intelligent, it would do so in a figurative way based on the common aspects or analogies between both terms (the compared one and the comparative one), and therefore expresses it in a hypothetical way, and can give no assurance about it.

That fundamental metaphorical mechanism of predicate attribution can be schematically expressed as follows:

FIGURE 1 – Scheme of metaphor showing the semantic spheres associated by their common aspects through metaphorical expression



Source: Author.

Although there are theories that advocate the occurrence of transfer and suppression of characteristics between the two terms of the metaphorical operation, what makes them questionable “is always the fact that we cannot tell who gains what and who loses instead something else. More than of a transfer we could speak of a back-and-forth of properties. This phenomenon was called ‘condensation’ by Freud” (ECO, 1994, p. 537). A metaphor may be *in presentia*, when both terms are expressed, or *in absentia*, when one only one of them – usually the comparative one – is evinced, and even in the latter case, as explains Edeline (1994, p. 549), the two terms are “linked by a copula expressing all possible degrees of comparison, ranging from likeness to total identity”. That is why a metaphor can always be explored more deeply, bringing to the fore

aspects of the analogy that were not intended in the first place, enlarging the range of common aspects between both terms. In the example “He is a computer”, someone may observe that, besides intelligent, he is also very fast or precise, or even that he is not very sensitive or emotional, once this person resembles and is being compared to a machine. Thus, every form of metaphor always operates a substitution, through a movement of displacement of meaning by similarity or contiguity, and a subsequent operation of condensation of the associated semantic fields, that is, a condensation between the compared term and a comparative term.

2. The cognitive nature of metaphor

The approach to the cognitive aspects of metaphor is based on the principle that it is, originally, a phenomenon of *apprehension* of reality and, subsequently, of mental association. Thought and consequent metaphorical use of semiotic systems are based both on the ability to *recognize* factual similarities existing in the surrounding environment, and on the ability to *establish* and *express* associations by similarity and contiguity between different objects. Such relations are not necessarily given or defined beforehand, and can be established by the mind of the one who observes the qualities inherent in each entity with the potential to evoke an almost infinite multiplicity of associations.

Despite the comprehensive literature on the subject, Eco (1994, p. 539) points to the fact that theories about it have been based on Aristotelian postulations about metaphor and the acknowledgment of its cognitive nature, which can be divided into three main lines of reasoning. The first understands it as a conceptual exchange of properties, and the second as a natural capacity of the mind to perceive characteristics of reality:

In the first line of thought, the metaphor was seen as a device producing an exchange of properties between conceptual entities, such an exchange producing in some way an *increasing of knowledge* or a *different understanding* of the concepts involved in the metaphorical ‘short circuit’. [...]

In the second line of thought, the cognitive aspect of the metaphor has been stressed. Undoubtedly Aristotle assigned a *cognitive* function to the metaphor, not only when he associates metaphor with enigma – an extended sequence of metaphors – but also when

he says that creating metaphors “is a sign of a natural disposition of the mind”, because *knowing how to find good metaphors* means perceiving or grasping the similarity of things between each other (Poetics, 1459a6-8). (ECO, 1994, p. 539, emphasis added)

Although the theories of metaphor can present features of each of those lines, in general terms, the first strand represents the classic theories of metaphor, and the ones that address its foundations. In the second strand, we can recognize the cognitive theories of metaphor, including the one proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, based on the experiential character of cognition.

For Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p. 5), “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. Among the many examples they furnish of how metaphors affect thought, perception and behavior, the “*argument is war* metaphor” shows that arguing is understood as being in opposition to someone else in a verbal battle, giving rise to many derived expressions such as “indefensible claims”, “to attack weak points or to demolish an argument”, and so forth. Accordingly, no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 2003, p. 19), giving rise to different kinds of metaphors (orientational, based on our experience of space, ontological, structural, conceptual, visual, etc.). As a fundamental mechanism of the mind, metaphors encompass what is learned from physical and social experience. They are based on the cognitive apprehension of the world through different sensory channels and also in the most fundamental values of the culture in which someone is immersed. Culture plays an essential role in metaphoric thinking for metaphorical structures are coherent with the fundamental concepts of each culture, shaping the way reality is apprehended by individuals. Hence, “metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language” (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 2003, p. 153), and its cognitive value relies in that it can provide a partial understanding of something based on previous experiences (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 2003, p. 154), and thus shape behavior.

Although one can say that “time is life”, evincing that the nature of both is akin, the well-known metaphor “time is money” is an example of how social experience shapes metaphorical thinking, for the association it establishes between the two terms can be considered typical of economic values that have increasingly permeated aspects of culture.

This approach suggests that the knowledge derived from the ordinary use of metaphors is no less important than what something really is. A new metaphor may capture or emphasize aspects of reality previously unknown or that went unnoticed and were not taken into account. The metaphor's cognitive power lies in the possibility of creating new and unusual associations, capable of increasing or modifying knowledge about reality.

The third line of reasoning about the cognitive nature of metaphors understands them as an integrated process of associations that constitutes the essential feature of the whole human semiotic activity and its most varied expressions (thought, language, psyche, etc.):

According to a third line of thought, the pair metaphor/metonymy characterizes the whole of human thought and of the semiotic activity. The position of Freud, quoted above, ranks in some way with this line. During the last decades the most impressive example of such a position has been undoubtedly the one of Jakobson, who has equated the pair metaphor/metonymy with the pair selection/combination (or paradigm/syntagm) and has applied this model to language (from aphasic disturbances to literature), to magic, to cinema, and the visual arts. Under the influence of Jakobson, Lacan has applied the same model to unconscious phenomena. (ECO, 1994, p. 540)

The adequacy of associations by similarity allows metaphor to manifest itself in multiple fields of expression, and the theories addressing it from an integral perspective facilitate the recognition of its possible ways, in multiple languages or semiotic systems, which often coexist in a hybrid, complex manner. Peircean semiotics can be included in that third perspective, and its propositions were essential for the elaborations of Jakobson (1960) and Lacan (2007[1975/1976], p. 117), both readers of Peirce. However, in spite of works such as the one made by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) that emphasize the cognitive and experiential grounds of metaphor, and the efforts made by the representatives of this third type of approach to broaden the understanding of metaphoric phenomena, many studies still discuss the multiple manifestations of metaphor solely in terms of verballity.

The Peircean approach to metaphor comprehends it in a broad, encompassing and integrated manner, due to the high degree of abstraction and generality of its concepts. Analyzing metaphor in semiotic terms

requires knowing and applying the fundamentals of the theory of signs and its different levels of specification, capable of revealing its various facets. Peircean semiotics is the science concerning all the phenomena of significance in their broadest variety of signs, as it is based on the phenomenological categories derived from observation of experience.

3. Peircean semiotics

Peirce, a philosopher, mathematician and scientist, searched for universal categories that could be found in everything that presents itself to the mind, and started by examining the most varied phenomena and how they could be captured by thought. That observational foundation, which he called *phaneroscopic* – a peculiar way of referring to phenomenological observations and reflections – led him to realize that every phenomenon can be understood from three omnipresent categories: *firstness*, *secondness* and *thirdness*.

In their most general sense, the categories are monadic, dyadic and triadic relations and, as modes of being, they are embodied in different degrees of prominence in everything that exists. Unlike categories established by other philosophers, such as Aristotle and Kant, the Peircean categories are not static or exclusive, because they are dynamically interconnected, so that, by the principle of *prescission* (PEIRCE, 1880, CP 1.353²), firstness can prescind from secondness and thirdness, and secondness can prescind from thirdness, but thirdness always encapsulates secondness and firstness, and secondness encapsulates firstness. Another characteristic of the dynamical interdependence of the categories lies in its recursiveness, by which it is always possible to observe that the three categories are recursively contained in each other, an aspect directly derived from their omnipresence and universality. As Ransdell (1997, §1) explains, Peirce was

convinced that semiotic had to be developed “architectonically”, meaning that it should be developed rigorously from a few relatively simple though highly abstract principles [the categories] which could be used recursively – that is, reapplied repeatedly to their own products – to yield a highly systematic (and potentially

² *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* are quoted as CP, preceded by the year of the manuscript, and followed by the volume, a dot, and the paragraph number.

infinite) network of conceptions of which none would be fully comprehensible apart from its systematic inter-relationships with other conceptions.

In a complementary perspective, Colapietro (1993, p. 61) observes that, although the categories are the most difficult of Peirce's ideas, they are also the most important because they deeply inform and guide his whole investigation of signs, for

One of the functions of Peirce's categories is to guide and stimulate inquiry. They are, in a word, heuristic. This is evident in the way the categories are used by Peirce in his exploration of the various types of signs. Any sign can be taken as something in itself; it might also be considered in relation to another (its object), finally, a sign might function as a go-between (a factor mediating between its object and its interpretant). (COLAPIETRO, 1993, p. 61.)

For Peirce (1897, CP 2.227), semiotics is a form of logic, a way of understanding how the different modes of meaning work and, therefore, the working of thought itself. As the categories are omnipresent, and thirdness is the category of representation and thought, everything can be thought of as a sign, since anything has properties that mean or are capable of meaning something, and that, therefore, can be explored and used to build meanings conveyed by signs. Peirce says that every triadic relation involves meaning, because, if we take any fact of the triadic kind,

by which I mean a fact which can only be defined by simultaneous reference to three things, and you will find there is ample evidence it was never produced by the action of forces on mere dyadic conditions. Thus, your right hand is that hand which is toward the *east*, when you face the *north* with your head toward the *zenith*. Three things, east, west, and up, are required to define the difference between right and left. [...]

In that way you will convince yourself thoroughly that every genuine triadic relation involves thought or *meaning*. Take, for example, the relation of *giving*. A *gives* B to C. This does not consist in A's throwing B away and its accidentally hitting C [...]. If that were all, it would not be a genuine triadic relation, but merely one dyadic relation followed by another. [...] Giving is a transfer of the right of property. Now right is a matter of law, and law is a matter of thought and meaning. I there leave the matter to

your own reflection, merely adding that, though I have inserted the word “genuine”, yet I do not really think that necessary. I think even degenerate triadic relations involve something like thought. (1903, CP 1.345)

Thus, every triadic relation involves meaning or thought of some sort, and a sign is a triadic relation that can be genuine in the sense of being fully general, or can be degenerate, a word Peirce borrows from geometry and by which he means a less general case or special form of signification. The importance of knowing the semiotic fundamentals of triadic relations to the understanding of thought is even clearer in another passage where Peirce (1903, CP 2.234) states that, in an imperfect but true division of triadic relations, they can be classified as relations of *comparison*, of *performance* and of *thought*. That classification derives from a recursive application of the three categories to the understanding of triadic relations. That means that those three types are representative of triadic relations of thought or meaning, but the third one is thought considered in its most genuine and fully triadic form, that is, triadic relations in which thirdness manifests itself more prominently. By their turn, relations of performance are degenerate or less general for they are triadic relations in which secondness manifests itself predominantly, whilst relations of comparison are even more degenerate triadic relations, once in them predominate aspects of firstness.

Metaphor, the focus of the present study, is a triadic relation of comparison that establishes similarities or analogies between two sets of monadic properties pertaining to two different things, without making any reference to the reality of that analogy. A monadic property can be understood as a wholly intrinsic property of something (see RANSDELL, 1997, §19), as a property regarded in itself, and metaphors make use of signs in which firstness also predominates, that is, iconic signs that are the more adequate kind of signs to establish that comparison and express this type of thought.

The sign is the simplest form of thirdness of philosophical interest (CP 1.339, undated), being the most important one to the understanding of thought (1903, CP 2.233), and it can be also investigated in its aspects of secondness and firstness. The sign is a triad, which is constituted as the irreducible relation between a sign in itself or *representamen*, what functions as representation and constitutes its ground, an *object* or referent, what is being represented, and an *interpretant*, conceived as

the signified effect of the sign or interpreting thought (1906, CP 8.322). Unlike the well-known triangle presented by Ogden and Richards (1989[1923], p. 11), the schematic representation of the sign triad is the tripod (1903, CP 2.274, 1903; CP 1.346), as it shows a monadic quality of the triad: its irreducibility, for what makes a sign as such is the amalgamation of its elements and their interrelations, generating meanings at different levels.

The sign or *representamen* (1903, CP 2.242) constitutes the firstness of the sign, and is connected to an *object*, its reference, which consists of the secondness of the sign. This means that the object can be apprehended on two levels: that of the *dynamical object*, that is the real object considered in itself which remains exterior to the sign and thus unaffected by any representations of it; and the *immediate object*, which is the way by which the sign represents the dynamical object (1909, CP 8.314). The triad is completed with its element of thirdness, the *interpretant*, understood as the effect of the sign which contains notions such as those of interpreter and interpretation, but differs from them and goes further, since the sign has an autonomous capacity to generate effects that do not depend on specific interpreters or particular interpretations. Similar to what happens with the object, but at a higher level of complexity, the interpretant (see SANTAELLA, 2004, p. 72-74) can be: *immediate*, which represents the interpretative potential of the sign that cannot be exhausted by any specific interpretation; *dynamical*, the actualized interpretant, the one that is materialized, made effective by the activity of the sign; and *final*, in the sense of the purpose of the sign, the latter an *in futuro* interpretant which represents the tendency of the process of generation of interpretants over time.

The combination of those different sign aspects and the recursive application of the categories gives rise to several sign trichotomies, the best known of those being the one that derives from the relations of the sign with its dynamical object, which is subdivided into *icon*, *index* and *symbol*, and in which it is again possible to observe the recursiveness of the categories. The icon holds qualitative similarities (firstness) in common with its dynamical object; the index maintains a dynamic connection (secondness) in time and/or space with its dynamical object; and the symbol is associated with its dynamical object by reason of an established habit, rule or convention (thirdness). It is important to emphasize that these three types can be found together, merged, due to the categories'

omnipresence. However, as Rauch (1980, p. 330) observes, “although Peircean Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness are found in linguistic treatments under the cover of icon, index and symbol, the pure dynamicals of the three phenomenological categories are not exploited fully”.

The icon has several subdivisions (SANTAELLA, 1996), and *hypoicons* are the type of iconic sign most directly related to this study. Hypoiconic signs were named by Peirce as such because, despite having predominant iconic aspects, they go beyond the typical vagueness of associations at the level of firstness, and function almost like genuine signs of thirdness, ostensibly representing their objects. *Hypoicons*, in turn, are subdivided into *images*, *diagrams* and *metaphors*:

A possibility alone is an Icon purely by virtue of its quality, and its object can only be a Firstness. But a sign may be *iconic*, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. If a substantive be wanted, an iconic representamen may be termed a *hypoicon*. [...]

Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or First Firstnesses, are *images*; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are *diagrams*; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*. (1902, CP 2.276-277)

For Peirce, any kind of hypoicon that associates two objects based on their meaningful properties, tracing a parallel between them, will be considered a metaphor, being of no importance whether the parallelism is expressed with or without the aid of a comparative particle in verbal language, allowing his theory to be applied to all kinds of metaphor on the same conceptual basis. Another aspect of Peirce’s vast semiotic theory that directly concerns this study is the type of dynamical interpretant that a sign is capable of producing, which can be *emotional*, *energetic* and *logical*. Peirce explains that:

The first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. There is almost always a feeling which we come to interpret as evidence that we comprehend the proper effect of the sign, although the foundation of truth in this is frequently very slight. This ‘emotional interpretant’, as I call it, may amount to much

more than that feeling of recognition; and, in some cases, it is the only proper significate effect that the sign produces. [...] If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional interpretant, and such further effect will always involve an effort. I call it energetic interpretant. The effort may be a muscular one [...], but it is much more usually an exertion upon the Inner World, a mental effort. It never can be the meaning of an intellectual concept, since it is a singular act, [while] such a concept is of a general nature. But what further kind of effect can there be? [...] I will call it logical interpretant. [...] Shall we say that this effect may be a thought, that is to say, a mental sign? No doubt it may be so; only, if this sign be of an intellectual kind - as it would have to be - it must itself have a logical interpretant; so that it cannot be the ultimate logical interpreter of the concept. (1907, CP 5.475-76.)

In the emotional interpretant, the sign produces only a quality of feeling, without producing cognition, whereas in the energetic interpretant, there is an effort involved, be it physical or mental. In the logical interpretant, an interpretive elaboration and consequent conclusion will result from the action of the sign.

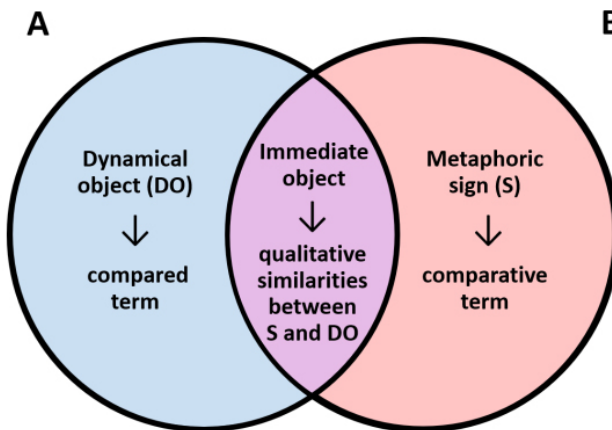
4. Metaphoric semiosis

For Peirce, metaphor is, above all, an *iconic sign*, and “his conception of the iconic sign – like his other semiotical conceptions – was developed neither by generalizing from cases and kinds of iconicity he had observed nor by appropriating a pre-existing theoretical conception of this sort of significance or meaningfulness”, as explained by Ransdell (1997, §1). Thus, Peirce’s theory of metaphor is among the most original ones addressing the subject matter, since it uses the philosophical and abstract basis of his categorial framework, which allows it to simultaneously include its cognitive and linguistic aspects, as well as its different types of manifestations.

This means that, according to the categories, the metaphor is a sign (thirdness) that relates to the object to which it refers, its dynamical object (secondness) with predominance of iconic aspects (firstness). Iconicity is fundamentally a relation of association by similarity between qualitative aspects carried by the sign, due to its immediate object or form

of representation, and the real qualities of the dynamical object, which can be schematically visualized as follows:

FIGURE 2 – Scheme of the metaphorical sign and its similarity relation with the dynamical object



Source: author.

The scheme above shows that, for Peirce (1867, CP 7.590), a metaphor can be defined as a “broad comparison on the ground of characters of a formal and highly abstract kind”. Such relations of comparison are imbued with a vague but insightful cognitive function of presenting the “logical possibilities” (1903, CP 2.234) that stem from qualitative similarities or isomorphisms. The *dynamical object* can be considered the *compared term* as described in traditional approaches, while the *comparative term* is the form of representation adopted by the sign in order to stand for its dynamical object, and the common qualitative features of both terms constitute the *immediate object* which is always encapsulated in the sign. This relation of similarity can be established in multiple ways, by capturing different aspects of both terms. The many typologies of metaphors can be understood as an attempt to classify those relations between the poles of a metaphor, to establish what is being made similar or what is being compared to what and how.

This phenomenon of intersection and condensation, between aspects of the compared term and the comparative one used as a sign, is intrinsic to the metaphorical mechanism and is always present. It can be

easily perceived in visual metaphors, where common qualitative features are fused or juxtaposed, or in poetic language, in which the figurative aspect is more evident, as in the opening lines of Emily Dickinson's famous poem:

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
[...]
(DICKINSON in JOHNSON, 1976, poem n. 1263)

Although in linguistic terms the construction “frigate like a book” is considered a comparison, due to the use of the comparative conjunction “like”, in semiotic terms the association between “frigate” and “book” is considered a metaphor as it links both through their common aspects, presenting books as a means of transportation for the mind and soul.

Peircean analysis of the metaphor can be further specified by applying the principle of recursiveness of the categories to the metaphorical sign, which, constituting itself as a hypoicon, allows a metaphor (hypoicon of thirdness) to encapsulate diagrammatic (hypoicon of secondness) and imagetive (hypoicon of firstness) aspects within itself. This encapsulation means that, like all iconic signs, metaphors represent one or some features of their dynamical object through their immediate object by relations across their various qualitative aspects. However, since they are hypoicons of thirdness, the parallelism of meanings they establish may contain structural analogies and similarities in appearance with their dynamical object, which substantiates and explains the complexity of the metaphorical process of signification in Peircean terms. The expression *family tree* can be taken as an example of those layers of meaning. This metaphor traces a relation of similarity between the image of a tree and the conformation of its branches with the relations across members of the same family, connecting their meanings, that is, this metaphor encapsulates imagetive similarities, structural analogies and a parallelism of meanings between the dynamical object ‘genealogical relations’ and its comparison with a tree contained in the sign.

An icon is a sign of predominant firstness whose object can only be also a firstness, which means that a metaphor is, therefore, a way of presenting an object through hypothetical analogies, for there is nothing determining this correlation, which does not mean that the object of a metaphor cannot be something existing, nor does it prevent a metaphor

from referring to some aspect of reality (see JUNGK, 2018). What a metaphor does is to ascribe some possible properties to its object in a vague and suggestive manner, but it can never do that in a propositional form, and thus cannot furnish any kind of certainty about the reality of the object's properties or characteristics that are being represented metaphorically. This means that a metaphor cannot designate an object or express its general characters as such, as a definition or a concept can do, although it can present them describing some of its attributes, without doing so thoroughly. However, in this case as in all others, the dynamical object as the real object that remains dynamic in the semiosis process will impose itself on the understanding of the sign meanings.

According to the same logic of categorical recursiveness, another form of metaphorical complexity can be observed in the encapsulation of icons into indexes, and of icons and indexes into symbols, which constitute a synthesis of the relations between the sign and the dynamical object, showing how iconicity is fundamental to any process of meaning. For Peirce, there is no other way of conveying meaning except through icons, evincing how metaphors, which are at the highest level of iconicity, are at the base of each and every semiosis process and language (1893, CP 2.290).

Although signs can be created, they have their own autonomy and, once created and expressed, they start to have effects or dynamical interpretants according to their interpretive potentiality (immediate interpretant), based on interpretive tendencies (final interpretant) manifested over time. Since they are iconic signs, metaphors tend to generate emotional interpretants in the dynamic level. However, due to their various and complex levels of meaning, there might be the generation of energetic and logical interpretants, in a more or less prominent manner. The metaphorical meaning depends a lot on the context in which it is generating interpretants, which is always changeable, and, therefore, every metaphor might always be explored, opening the path to deeper considerations about its referent.

The intersection of two semantic spheres creates a region of iconicity whose outlines cannot be fully defined, and the *vitality* of a metaphor does not lie only in the most evident common elements it presents at first sight. The more adequate is the association between the two terms, that is, the more a comparative term is capable of functioning as a sign of a dynamical object, the more a metaphor will open

possibilities to explore the immediate object or the qualitative common aspects between them, and thus to discover new relations of similarity between the sign and dynamical object, allowing to capture analogies that until then had gone unnoticed, and that might well be beyond the content intended in its inception, as in the example “He is a computer” discussed above. The common area between two semantic fields created by a metaphor is malleable, flexible, imbued with *semantic plasticity*, which shows why a metaphor can be interpreted as a mistake or a lie, but also as a revelation about something and even as a bearer of truth. In Peircean terms, truth is expressible by signs that adequately stand for real features of their dynamical objects and, although a metaphor can only do that in a suggestive iconic manner, this capacity demonstrates its fundamental cognitive nature.

An adequate and thus good metaphor establishes a connection between different real features that objectively belong to certain entities or objects. Although its emergence goes through human subjectivity, since the relation established is created in the mind of the one who expresses it, it carries a background of truth, for it will only produce effects of meaning if those similarities are really observable by an interlocutor. This revelatory power is especially observable in adequate, innovative and creative metaphors, when the relation of similarity is established for the first time and the vitality of the metaphorical expression is stronger.

In the process of semiosis, every sign has the potential to generate certain types of dynamical interpretants, those that actually occur in the mind of interpreters, based on their relation with the dynamical object, which can be iconic, indexical and symbolic. *Iconic signs* can generate primarily emotional interpretants or simple qualities of feeling; *indexical signs* tend to generate energetic interpretants, that is, physical or mental actions that require an effort of some kind; and *symbolic signs* tend to generate logical interpretants. In the course of sign action or semiosis, these effective interpretants will follow interpretive tendencies specific to each of these types of signs. Metaphors are signs that awaken sensitivity through qualitative impressions, feelings, emotions and other emotional interpretants. Despite the ineffability of the ways of feeling in general, this type of interpretant forms the basis that underlies actions and attitudes, reasoning and thinking.

5. Metaphoric iconicity: from motivation to conventionality

Metaphorical mechanisms of meaning account for many commonly used metaphorical expressions and also for the appearance of many words in a certain language, whose referents are often iconically designated according to one or some of its features (see JUNGK, 2011).

Since its inception, metaphors follow through successive stages on a diachronic path that goes from motivation to conventionality. Initially, the newly created metaphor is semantically innovative, creative, original, as it relates semantic spheres in an unusual way, according to Nöth (1995, p. 131). Over time, however, as it becomes part of the daily language due to its multiple occurrences, the metaphor becomes ordinary and can become conventional, *lexicalized*, becoming a word inserted in the set of rules of the codified system of language, such as for example, the word ‘metaphor’ itself, which is an example of how a symbol, which indicates a particular dynamical object, has an icon as the base of its meaning.

With the disappearance of the original meaning, an *opaque metaphor* emerges, as in the case of the word ‘radical’ which, in a literal sense, means that which ‘comes from the root’, but is now used to mean that which is profound, abrupt or violent (for example, radical change, radical opinion), among other figurative meanings. Another interesting example of this opacity can be found in mathematics. The root finding operation seeks to find the ‘root’ of a given number, which may sound strange to anyone who associates the word with the lower part of a plant, and does not know that, etymologically, the word comes from the Latin ‘radix’, which originally meant basis and foundation of something, according to Houaiss (2001). Thus, the square or cubic root of a number can be understood in a clearer and more transparent way as the base (side) of the square or cube of a certain value (for example, the square root of 4 corresponds to the side of the square of area 4, which is equal to 2, or even, the cubic root of 9 corresponds to the side of the cube of volume 9, which is equal to 3), being that the foundation of the root finding operation, according to Ricieri (2004).

Conventionalization leads, over time, to *dead metaphors*, in which the semantic transparency has been totally lost, and the motivation for the original meaning is known only to the etymologist, according to Nöth (1995, p. 131). Although some metaphors are considered dead

due to the *semantic opacity* with which they are commonly used, their potentiality remains contained in the lexicon, making them potential structures that can be explored and updated by their iconic, poetic exploration, reversing the conventionalization process. Transparency is fundamental to the production and maintenance of the semantic vitality of the metaphor, since

Imagery is in general a matter of linguistic awareness: only then is a linguistic sign produced and understood as a metaphor when the speaker/hearer is aware of the tension between the literal and figurative meanings of the sign. By contrast with simple polysemy, metaphor presupposes semantic transparency. (NÖTH, 1995, p. 131)

The *remetaphorization* or resurrection of dead metaphors makes it possible to revive the image or other form of iconicity that it carries from its origin, once again evincing the figurative sense that goes unnoticed in the ordinary use. That process of revitalizing opaque metaphors awakens the language awareness of those who use or interpret the metaphor, who become aware of the articulation between the literal and the figurative sense and their iconic potential for meaning.

6. Multimodal metaphors

Metaphorical mechanisms are elementary for the expression of all forms of human communication. They are able to illustrate, emphasize or iconically show what is being expressed, endowing it with strength, producing a stronger impression and imposing itself on the spirit: you may simply say that you are very hungry, but also that you could eat a horse. Multimodal perspectives on metaphor encompass all their different modes of expression in different kinds of signs. Peirce's semiotic approach to metaphor can also contribute to its multimodal analysis by the application of its multileveled sign types.

Peirce shows that the *modus operandi* of metaphorical thinking is created based on the association by similarity (1893, CP 7.392) of certain monadic qualities, dyadic and triadic relations that exist in all the objects and entities in the world and whose correspondences can be used in any process of meaning. Associations by similarity are broad and plastic, serving multiple uses and the Peircean analysis allows us to understand

the inexhaustible nature of the iconicity contained in metaphors, since the relations between dynamical object and immediate object can always be explored from new perspectives, enriching the metaphorical meaning.

Therefore, a metaphor can be expressed in various ways, that is, a verbal metaphor can be visually explored; a visual metaphor can be verbally enunciated; a verbal metaphor can be used to explain sounds; among many other possibilities. Each language or semiotic system favors a different *communication channel* (verbal, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, gestural, oneiric, etc.), each with its specific potentials and limitations, and some metaphors can be better expressed in one system than in another. If, on the one hand, there are metaphors that can be more easily expressed verbally (for example, a bird in the hand is worth two in the air), on the other hand, there are relations between qualities that are difficult to express through words and which are more easily expressed visually.

The concepts of transfer and similarity are also essential for the understanding of visual metaphors, wherein there will always be some kind of condensation between two elements, although there can be simple visual condensations that are not actual metaphors. The *semantic intersection* and condensation operation that characterizes the metaphor continues to be active and can expand or restrict itself, depending on how it is expressed. Many visual metaphors in pictorial arts, design and advertising assume as their starting point metaphors that already exist in verbal language or in literature: sayings, clichés, poems, etc. The revival and reinterpretation of metaphors allows for a better understanding of their dynamical object, as it makes evident the aspects that were originally represented by the sign, highlighting its iconicity and revealing its common structures.

7. Final remarks: the value of a good metaphor

Despite the comprehensive literature on the subject, the investigation and discussion regarding the functioning of metaphor are still fundamental to understanding the nature of thought and language. Although Peirce's direct references to metaphorical processes may be considered scarce, what can be considered his *semiotic theory of metaphor* or *metaphorology*, understood as a systematic approach to the workings of metaphors, results from the use of his detailed typologies

of signs, based on categorical principles, proving to be highly original and profitable.

According to Peirce (CP 2.279, 1895), the main distinguishing characteristic of icons is that, by their direct observation, other truths concerning their object can be discovered, in addition to those that were sufficient to determine their construction. A metaphor cannot be fundamentally considered an error, a mistake or even a lie because, in Peircean terms, it is a *cognitive possibility* and, despite assigning certain characteristics to an object, it does not do it in a propositional form and, therefore, does not allow its appreciation in terms of truth or untruth in a peremptory manner. Even a metaphor mistakenly or cunningly employed by someone aiming to deceive or to lie can always be useful to understand and reveal the intentions of those using it. Metaphors invite us to see something in an iconic way, and the true value of a good metaphor lies in expanding the possibilities of knowledge about the referred object, through the continuous association of elements that can decipher it by similarity.

Although the interaction between the sign and the dynamical object can be considered inexhaustible in the metaphorical sign, the stability of a particular metaphor shows its suitability for a certain stage of development of the psychic, social, physical and logical context wherein it subsists. Metaphors are essential for the emotional, empirical and cognitive articulation of reality, being a *sine qua non* condition for the development and the symbolic, cultural and scientific accomplishments of human beings, who are constantly creating and modifying patterns of feeling, thought and action through the *iconic power* of thought and of all forms of language.

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