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HUMOR AND MULTIMODALITY: CLASSIC PERFORMANCES BY CHARLIE CHAPLIN

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Abstract: Faced with the multiple forms of cinematographic narrative, based on theoretical assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics, this research investigates how the multimodality in metonymies favors the development of humor in an audiovisual production. Through a bibliographical and qualitative research, scenes interpreted by actor Charlie Chaplin were investigated in which the use of non-verbal language reveals multimodal choices. Scenes from the films “The Great Dictator” (1940) and “The Gold Rush” (1925) will be analyzed. Regarding the theoretical foundation, concepts on the following topics are analyzed: multimodality and multimodal metonymies; audiovisual production and theories about humor. Therefore, this study provides reflection and scientific contribution to academic research related to the understanding of multimodality in metonymies from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, studies on theories of humor and artistic productions in audiovisual format.

Keywords: Movie theater, Humor, Multimodality.

INITIAL WORDS

Both verbal and non-verbal language are part of film productions. In a movie scene, the characters’ speeches, the choice of shooting angle, the colors used, the clothes and objects, the soundtrack and many other resources contribute to the construction of the narrative in the audiovisual format.

The choice of these elements is often not random, but rather represents or evokes knowledge established by social and cultural agreements of a certain time and society, for example, a suspenseful song can already arouse in the spectator a tension about the next scene that will come.

This way, the audiovisual market is developing its productions with metonymic

resources in which “X replaces Y”. We are able to access a conceptual whole only from a part. This triggered part works as a trigger to access a larger conceptual whole. In the phrase “I like to read Machado de Assis”, the author’s name is the trigger that replaces the author’s works. In a film, to exemplify the metonymic processes, we can think of how the filming focuses on a weapon that can suggest a future action scene with violence or how the execution of a romantic soundtrack can point to a next scene. of love. The infinite possibilities of these forms reveal the multimodal character of cinematographic narrative.

This multimodal metonymic perspective is also present in comic film narratives. Therefore, this study investigates how the construction of multimodal metonymies contributes to the construction of the scene and the production of humor. Through a bibliographical and qualitative research, we analyzed scenes from the films “The Great Dictator” (1940) and “The Gold Rush” (1925).

The article is divided into the following sections: (i) linguistic studies with considerations about multimodality and multimodal metonymies in the light of Cognitive Linguistics; (ii) concepts about audiovisual productions and humor; (iii) analysis of Charlie Chaplin scenes. Thus, this article provides theoretical reflection on linguistic, humorous and cinematographic knowledge.

LINGUISTIC STUDIES: MULTIMODALITY AND METONYMIES

In this section, we first describe how meaning is understood in the light of Cognitive Linguistics, and then we discuss multimodality, metonymy and multimodal metonymy.

For Kress (2010), the communication process involves meanings produced and found in our daily life. Thus, meaning is the result

of a mental construction that goes through constant mechanisms of “categorization and recategorization of the world, from the interaction of cognitive structures and shared models of socio-cultural beliefs” (FERRARI, 2011, p. 15).

According to Chiavegatto (2009), meaning is guided by linguistic forms, it is a mental construction that expresses the interconnection between knowledge and language and is also validated in the communicative context. During communication, meaning in a verbal language (words) or in a non-verbal language (gestures, images, colors...) is constructed during the context in which they are inserted, being developed according to our social, cultural, emotional experiences. and historical, for example.

Given these conceptual considerations about meaning, it is possible that different people look at an “apple” and understand the meaning of this object from different points of view. One can think of flavor, texture, color, shape. Another might think that this fruit might be associated with Snow White or the Garden of Eden. Another person can also think of the “Apple” brand of technological products. It is possible for a person to think of all these possibilities mentioned and others not mentioned according to their experiences that are related to how we understand meaning and, consequently, how we understand the world.

In the aforementioned example of the “apple”, we notice that the mental associations are in different formats, that is, the taste that can be linked to the shape or even the name of a brand of technological products that can refer us to a biblical episode.

Faced with these possibilities of multiforms, we started with the concept of multimodality. Multimodality is related to the production of a text in more than one semiotic way (Cf. SPERANDIO, 2015). We understand that a

gesture, an object, an image, a sound, a color, an animal and others, in a communicative context, can be considered possible languages according to the historical and cultural traditions of a people.

The association of meanings by multimodal means can occur through metonymic processes. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metonymy is a conceptual phenomenon in which “X replaces Y”. This replacement is possible because there is a close relationship between two entities. Thus, metonymy carries a primarily referential function because it is possible to use one entity for another.

For Koowuttayakorn (2018), multimodal metonymies are those in which target and source belong to different modes of representation. Currently, multimodal metonymies have been observed in digital communications since the image-text relationship is a frequency in *memes, stories* in *Instagram/Facebook*, for example. Koowuttayakorn (2018) also states that studies on multimodal metonymy are also observed in research on journalistic text, cartoons, illustrated books, games, films and others..

AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS AND HUMOR: INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS

Initially, we describe the elements present in audiovisual productions and, then, we present concepts about humor based on the comedy tripod.

The audiovisual content has narrative elements that contribute to the construction of the scene favoring the development of a story. In a short, medium or feature film it is possible to observe how these elements behave.

We understand the following elements as a narrative medium in a scene: photography (plans, cuts, lighting, camera movements), elements in the scene, sound design and

soundtrack, actor's performance and costumes. Such elements contribute to the process of making sense of a scene, that is, to the construction of the *mise en scène* (Cf. PORCHAT et al., 2020).

In works that focus on the development of the comic, humor is present and can use such elements. Laughter is aroused in the spectator "under the condition of falling to the surface of a calm and well-articulated spirit" (BERGSON, 1978, p. 7), as social, emotional, cultural factors and knowledge of the world influence the understanding of a humorous scene.

Laughter is provoked, according to Bergson (1978), when what is presented does not correspond to the established norm, that is, it does not correspond to the mechanical, to the programmed. Therefore, humor is a tool to control social agreements.

Research on humor has traditionally been based on three theories, known as the comedy tripod (Cf. TABACURU, 2015; VIANA et al., 2020): tension-relaxation model, superiority and incongruity. A comic production can have more than one theory relating to each other and it is possible, in some cases, to find the predominance of one of these theories.

The Tension-Relaxation Model or Theory of Relief is tied to the forbidden. There is an expectation that people do not speak in public or talk about topics related to ethics, morality, customs, habits and other socially consecrated traditions. When one of these themes are put on display, it feels like a social barrier has been breached.

For Freud (1905), the reason for the most hysterical laughter was noticed in moments that normally must not be laughed, this fact, he called "cerebral yawn". It's like the brain's escape valve reacting in a complicated situation. For example, this "brain yawn" occurs when laughing at someone who farts in public or when someone takes a tumble.

In some social circumstances one must not laugh at such facts.

The Superiority Theory is also known as the derision, hostility, belittling or aggression theory. Plato (apud TABACURU, 2015, p. 116) had already noticed something in the human who is amused by seeing ridicule, malice or envy in other people. Aristotle (apud TABACURU, 2015, p. 116) described comedy as "an imitation of worse than average men; worse, however, not in relation to any kind of defect, but only in relation to a particular kind, the ridiculous, which is a species of the ugly".

Thus, the clown's extravagant clothes (BALLAS, 2020a; 2020b) when compared with our everyday clothes already escapes the abnormality and, therefore, already contributes to laughter. According to Dulcan (2020), when a comedian tells a story, in which he is not successful in his action, in popular language "he gets screwed/is ashamed", the audience feels at a higher level, generating a feeling of relief because such a fact did not occur with those who attend.

Incongruity theory is also known as inconsistency, contradiction, ambivalence or bisociation theory. Dulcan (2020) highlights that, for Schopenhauer, the Theory of Laughable, known as Theory of Incongruity, is born of an element of surprise and for Kant, humor is born of an experimental look.

According to Perks (2012), people laugh at what is new or inconsistent in their previous schemas. In the structure of a joke, traditionally, there are two moments. According to Keisalo (2018), the first moment, set-up, presents a situation or idea, in which in a second moment, punchline, provides a new perspective on the set-up, sometimes a radically altered perspective. Therefore, there is an incongruity in this division.

According to Bergson (1978), the "comic is inconsistent" (BERGSON, 1978, p. 12).

The comic is like deviations from a line of reasoning. As an example, we quote the following one-line joke: (a) “Who fires the HR guy?” Nando Viana (VIANA et al., 2020). The incongruity lies in the fact that the Human Resources – HR sector has a boss responsible for hiring and firing people, however if that boss needed to be fired, who in HR would fire him?

In view of the description of the elements of cinematographic narratives and the resources that contribute to the production of humor through the tripod of comedy, we analyze below scenes from Charlie Chaplin films in order to verify how such elements and resources are linked to multimodal metonymies.

MULTIMODAL METONYMIES WITH CHARLIE CHAPLIN

In this stage of the study, we analyzed scenes from the films “The Great Dictator” (1940) and “The Gold Rush” (1925) with Charlie Chaplin’s performance. We briefly describe a synopsis of the film scene in order to contextualize the analysis and then investigate multimodal metonymies in the scenes.

In the scene from the movie “The Gold Rush”, the character Carlitos (played by Charlie Chaplin) eats his own shoelaces. He curls the shoelaces like they’re spaghetti noodles. This scene in the film humorously portrays how the character Carlitos, who is a poor bum, faces hunger in an Alaskan storm. Hunger during a storm in such a cold place would normally be the subject of drama, however humor is employed to develop this comic scene..

In this scene, we analyzed the following resources of the cinematographic narrative: (i) elements in the scene; (ii) performance of the main actor; (iii) soundtrack; (iv) plans.

Regarding the elements in the scene, in table 6, of figure 1, an object is used instead of another, that is, shoelaces replace food. A multimodal metonymy is identified in which target and source belong to different modes: one is food and the other is an object.

The performance of the main actor when cooking the shoelaces, sitting at the table to eat and when winding the shoelaces with a fork as if they were spaghetti noodles is guided, contribute to the understanding of metonymy: *shoelaces by spaghetti*.

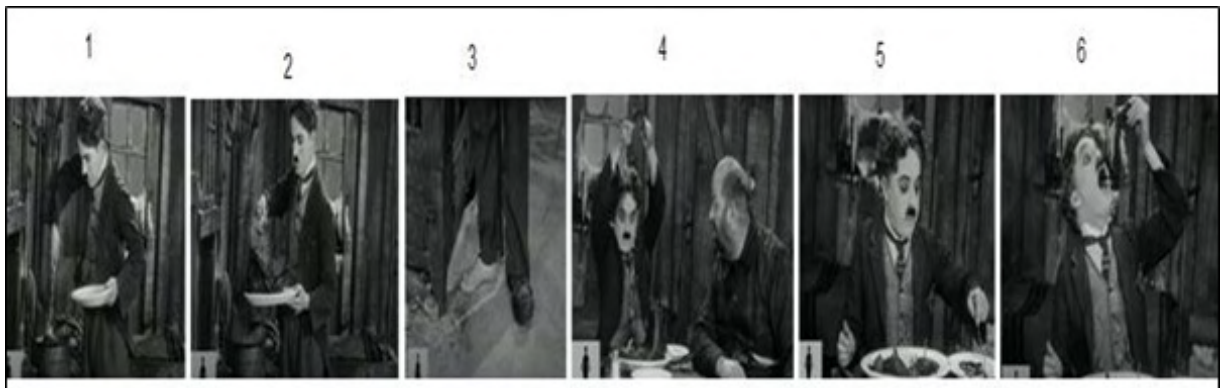


Figure 1: The Gold Rush (1925).

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u65lvwfTPtM>.

The action of eating the shoelaces provides humor because it is based on the Theory of Incongruence, since there is a social behavior related to eating spaghetti that is performed, however, there is a breach of expectation since the food is not pasta, but shoelaces.

Regarding the soundtrack, the musical production triggers the viewer about the foreseeable future because it is a prototypical song of comic scenes. In the frame of figure 1 the song “Thanksgiving Day/Impending Doom” is played. This melody is considered a metonymy for a scene with humor because the selected song presents repetitions of melodic themes (SESSA, 2021). Such repetition is known as a “motif”, which is a recurring, perceptible fragment or succession of notes that can be used to build a melody and themes.

The framing, plans, in a scene are part of photography studies. According to Porchat et al. (2020), photography in an audiovisual work is the interpretation of a script through images. In frames 1 and 2 of figure 1, there is an American shot, which shows the character up to his knees, and allows the spectator to understand the whole of the story.

This framing allows you to visualize that the character is cooking.

In frame 3, in figure 1, there is a close-up, which focuses on the character’s feet, revealing that the foot is missing a shoe. In tables 4 to 6 of figure 1, the framing allows the visualization of two people sitting at the table to eat. As there is no focus on an open/general plan that shows all the elements of the scene, the framings performed help us to understand the script of the story from a visual and metonymic perspective. Even if at times it is not possible to visualize the whole of the scene, we see parts that allow us to understand the whole of what is being narrated.

The selected scene from “The Great Dictator” (1940) is the part in which the dictator character (Charlie Chaplin) plays with the terrestrial globe.

The first incongruity in this scene that already makes humor possible is in the first frame of figure 2 in which the dictator is in an unusual place: clinging to the curtains. Next, we analyze in this scene the following resources of the cinematographic narrative: (i) soundtrack; (ii) elements in the scene and (iii) performance of the main actor.

Metonymically, the calm soundtrack suggests a sentimental moment for the character. In frames 2 and 3, of figure 2, the

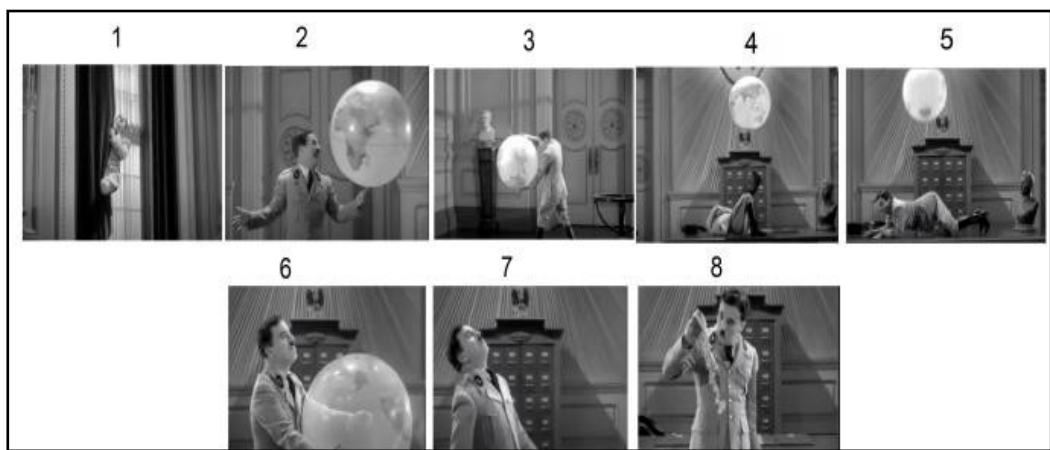


Figure 2: “The Great Dictator” (1940).

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGBCsZJRcAI>.

dictator holds an inflatable ball with the geographical design of world maps. He enjoys throwing the ball in the air as if he has control of the world in his hands. In frames 4 and 5, in which the dictator kicks the ball sometimes with his leg and sometimes with his buttocks, this action points to the fact that the dictator was not so careful with the inflatable terrestrial globe. These actions make it possible to understand the multimodal inflatable ball metonymy per world.

In frames 6 to 8, in figure 2, the dictator in one of his games pops the ball and is startled by the noise of the pop. The metonymy burst of the ball for the destruction of the world is understood.

The central metonymy of this scene can be represented as follows: game with the ball by the government of the dictator in which the fun/government of the dictator ends with the destruction of the inflatable ball/world.

FINAL WORDS

We found that humor in audiovisual productions can subtly deal with social, historical and political issues and promote reflections, since as Jerónimo (2015) highlights: “the multiple functions of humor can be both a threat and a contribution to the social freedom” (JERÓNIMO, 2015, p. 49).

Charlin Chaplin, in the scripts analyzed, through the Theory of Incongruity, develops the comic in scenes, whether eating shoelaces or with a dictator clinging to the curtain.

Hunger and politics are highlighted themes with multimodal metonymies created by the soundtrack, objects in the scene, framing/plans and the actor's performance, which work as triggers (part-whole) promoting laughter and reflection on a much larger whole than just portrayed on stage.

It is worth noting that metonymic phenomena were studied in different language forms present in the excerpts of

investigated films, however we understand that metaphorical processes, conceptual blends or other linguistic or extralinguistic issues could have been researched as well.

This way, we found relationships between studies of Cognitive Linguistics, theories about humor and elements of narrative in cinematographic productions. Therefore, this article makes possible a scientific contribution to studies on humor, artistic productions in audiovisual format and multimodality in metonymies from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics.

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