LINGUOCULTURAL POTENTIAL OF VEHICLE INSCRIPTIONS WITH METAPHORICAL AND METONYMIC MOTIVATION

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Abstract. The paper examines vehicle inscriptions (texts placed on the rear windows, bumpers, mudflaps and cabs of trucks, buses, taxis and private cars) as a form of vernacular writing that condenses cultural knowledge into very short utterances. Special attention is paid to inscriptions whose meaning is motivated by conceptual metaphor and metonymy. It is argued that these two cognitive mechanisms turn a brief text into a carrier of value orientations, cultural codes and collective memory, and that this gives vehicle inscriptions considerable linguocultural potential.

Keywords: vehicle inscriptions, linguoculturology, conceptual metaphor, metonymy, motivation, cultural code, cultural conceptualization.

1. Introduction

Vehicle inscriptions belong to the sphere of informal, "folk" writing. They are created not by professional authors but by drivers and owners, and they are addressed to an anonymous audience: other road users who read them in a few seconds, usually in motion. Despite their small size, such texts express a speaker's attitude to the road, to family, to work and to fate. For this reason they are a valuable source for research conducted within the anthropocentric paradigm, which treats language as a means of expressing and preserving the mentality of a people.

The linguocultural study of vehicle inscriptions is still at an early stage. Existing work mostly records and classifies them by theme, whereas the question of why particular images recur on cars and trucks, and what cultural knowledge stands behind these images, remains less explored. This paper addresses that question by focusing on motivation. The aim is to identify how metaphor and metonymy shape the meaning of vehicle inscriptions and to describe the linguocultural information that these figurative models encode. The study relies on descriptive, componential and conceptual analysis, supplemented by cultural interpretation of the examples. The illustrative material is drawn from Uzbek-language inscriptions, which are given with literal English glosses.

2. Theoretical background

Linguoculturology investigates the interrelation of language and culture, treating linguistic units as bearers of cultural meaning (Telia, 1996; Maslova, 2001). Its central notions include the cultural concept, the cultural code, the precedent text and the national linguistic worldview. A closely related approach, Cultural Linguistics, speaks of cultural conceptualizations, that is, schemas, categories and metaphors shared by members of a cultural group and realised in language (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2017). Both approaches assume that the linguistic form of an utterance is rarely arbitrary: it is motivated by the way a community categorises experience.

Within cognitive linguistics, metaphor is understood as a mapping from a source domain onto a target domain, which allows abstract or less accessible experience to be structured through concrete and familiar experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). Metonymy, in contrast, operates within a single conceptual domain: one element of the domain provides mental access to another (Radden &

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Kövecses, 1999). Jakobson (1956) had earlier contrasted the two as relations of similarity and contiguity. Kövecses (2005) has shown that metaphors are shaped by culture as well as by universal bodily experience, which explains why the same target concept may be framed differently in different societies.

The term "motivation" is used here to denote a transparent, conceptually grounded link between the form of an inscription and its meaning. Vehicle inscriptions are especially suitable material for this kind of analysis. Their extreme brevity and their dependence on a rapid, shared reading leave no room for explanation, so the author has to rely on images that the reader can decode instantly. Figurative models, which draw on familiar knowledge, are therefore the natural strategy.

3. Metaphorical motivation

Metaphorically motivated inscriptions rely on a small number of source domains that are familiar from traditional culture. The first is the domain of the animal, above all the horse. The vehicle is conceptualised as a steed, as in Temir ot ("iron horse") or in the use of the proverb Ot – yigitning qanoti ("A horse is a man's wings"). The model VEHICLE IS A HORSE transfers to the car the attributes that Turkic culture has long attached to the horse: loyalty, speed, status and the owner's pride. In the same way, a heavy truck may be framed as a ship that crosses the steppe or desert (Cho'l kemasi, "ship of the desert"), an image that borrows from the camel the idea of endurance on a long and hard route.

The second productive domain is the JOURNEY. The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, described by Lakoff and Johnson, finds a particularly literal realisation on the road. Inscriptions such as Yo'l – hayot ("The road is life") merge the physical and the existential plane, so that driving becomes a statement about destiny. A culturally specific element appears in the formula Oq yo'l ("white road"), a traditional wish for a safe journey and a happy outcome. Here the colour code is activated: white is associated with purity, good fortune and blessing, and the metaphorical ROAD IS A PATH OF LUCK carries these associations onto the traveller's route.

A third group concerns the image of the driver. Inscriptions that present the owner as a ruler or a bird of prey (for instance, "sultan of the roads") draw on the domains of power and the hunt and construct a self-image of strength, independence and masculine dignity. The analysis shows that the source domains of vehicle metaphors are not random. They coincide with the central images of Uzbek folklore, proverbs and everyday speech, so that the inscription functions as a short allusion to a much larger body of cultural text.

4. Metonymic motivation

Metonymy plays an equally important role, although its contribution is easier to overlook because it does not create a striking image. It supplies the inscription with a compressed, implicit meaning that the reader completes from shared knowledge. Three metonymic models are especially frequent.

The first is PLACE FOR PERSON, in which a toponym stands for the owner's identity and origin. Inscriptions like Farg'ona yigiti ("a lad from Fergana") or Samarqanddan salom ("greetings from Samarkand") do not describe the person in any detail. Instead, the name of the place activates a whole set of regional stereotypes, such as hospitality, craftsmanship and local pride, and presents the driver as a representative of a community. In a mobile setting, where vehicles cross regional borders, this metonymy performs the function of self-identification before strangers.

The second model is EFFECT FOR CAUSE or, more precisely, a ritual act standing for its expected result. The inscription Ona duosi ("mother's prayer") names the blessing, but the intended meaning is protection on the road. Behind it stands the cultural belief that the approval of parents brings baraka and shields the traveller from misfortune. The same applies to invocations of divine protection

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placed on the dashboard or the windscreen. In this way, the family and religious values of society are expressed with a single noun phrase.

The third model is a food or object term standing for livelihood and moral conduct. The phrase Halol luqma ("lawful morsel") uses a unit of food to refer to honestly earned income, and consequently to the ethics of work. For a professional driver, whose vehicle is also a means of earning, such a statement affirms a moral stance and addresses the reader as a member of the same value community. As these examples show, metonymic inscriptions are strongly dependent on background knowledge, and their cultural content is therefore retrievable only for those who share it.

5. Linguocultural potential

The linguocultural potential of vehicle inscriptions can be described on three levels. On the cognitive level, metaphor and metonymy reveal how the community conceptualises mobility, the road, work and belonging. On the axiological level, the inscriptions fix a stable set of values: respect for parents, honest labour, hospitality, courage, faith and loyalty to one's native region. On the communicative level, they establish contact between strangers by appealing to a shared cultural code and by performing speech acts of wishing, blessing, warning and self-presentation.

The inscriptions also activate several cultural codes at once. The zoomorphic code appears in the images of the horse, the camel and the eagle. The colour code is present in oq yo'l. The kinship code is represented by the figures of the mother and parents, and the spatial code by the road and the native place. Frequently, metaphor and metonymy interact, an effect that Goossens (1990) described as metaphtonymy. For example, in an inscription that invokes a mother's prayer for a road imagined as a path of luck, a metonymic blessing is embedded in a metaphorical journey, and the two mechanisms jointly produce a single complex meaning.

Another aspect of this potential is that inscriptions preserve and renew traditional knowledge. Proverbs, formulas of blessing and old images are adapted to modern technology, and so the traditional worldview continues to function in a new communicative setting. This has practical consequences. In translation and intercultural communication, figurative inscriptions pose the problem of culture-specific connotations: a literal rendering of Oq yo'l or Ona duosi conveys the denotation but loses the associative background. In language teaching, such short texts may serve as accessible material for introducing learners to cultural concepts. In lexicography and corpus linguistics, they offer data on living, non-codified usage that dictionaries rarely capture.

From the methodological point of view, a linguocultural description of an inscription should proceed in several steps. First, the text is segmented and its literal meaning is established. Second, the figurative mechanism is identified: the source and target domains are specified for a metaphor, and the domain matrix and the direction of conceptual access for a metonymy. Third, the cultural knowledge required to decode the inscription is reconstructed, including references to folklore, religion, kinship norms and everyday practice. Finally, the evaluative and pragmatic functions are determined by taking into account the type of vehicle, the likely author and the situation of reading. This sequence makes it possible to compare inscriptions across regions and languages on a uniform basis and to avoid a purely impressionistic interpretation.

The analysis also raises the question of the limits of interpretation. Some inscriptions are polysemous, and the same formula may be read as a blessing, as a warning or as a mark of group identity depending on the reader. For this reason, the researcher's intuition should be supported by additional evidence, such as interviews with drivers, observation of the contexts in which a text is

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displayed, and comparison with parallel examples in proverbs and folk songs. Only a combination of linguistic and ethnographic methods can show whether the cultural meaning attributed to an inscription is actually shared by its authors and readers.

6. Humour, irony and the pragmatic dimension

A separate group is formed by inscriptions in which figurative motivation is combined with humour or irony. Warnings addressed to the driver behind (for example, a playful reminder to keep distance, or the self-ironic Tez yursam ham, orqada qolmayman, roughly "even if I drive fast, I do not stay behind") rely on a deliberate conflict between the literal and the intended meaning. The reader has to resolve this conflict by drawing on shared cultural knowledge, and the successful decoding creates a feeling of closeness between strangers. In this respect, figurative inscriptions perform a phatic and a social function as well as an informative one: they soften an otherwise impersonal road situation and turn it into a brief act of communication.

The pragmatic orientation of the inscriptions varies with the type of vehicle. Texts on long-distance trucks tend to emphasise endurance, honest labour and the blessing of parents, which reflects the conditions of a profession in which the driver spends long periods away from home. Taxi and minibus inscriptions more often contain formulas of hospitality and respect for passengers, whereas private cars display personal and family messages. This distribution indicates that figurative models are selected in accordance with the social role of the author, and that the cultural content of an inscription cannot be separated from the communicative situation in which it is displayed.

It should also be noted that the cultural load of an inscription is not constant. Under the influence of mass media, migration and globalisation, traditional images are combined with borrowed ones, and imported slogans appear alongside proverbs and blessings. The coexistence of these layers makes vehicle inscriptions a convenient indicator of cultural change and shows that the linguocultural potential of this genre lies as much in its adaptability as in its conservation of tradition.

7. Conclusion

The analysis suggests that metaphor and metonymy are the principal mechanisms by which vehicle inscriptions acquire cultural meaning. Metaphor draws on domains such as the horse, the desert ship, the journey and power, and thereby connects the modern vehicle with the traditional imagery of the culture. Metonymy compresses information about origin, protection and moral conduct into short formulas that depend on shared background knowledge. Together they make vehicle inscriptions a concentrated reflection of the national linguistic worldview, a source of data on values and cultural codes, and promising material for further research in linguoculturology, translation studies and intercultural communication. A natural direction for future work is a corpus-based comparison of Uzbek inscriptions with those of other linguistic communities.

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