

OSCAR, CÉSAR, LUMIÈRE¹ AND THE OTHERS. SEMANTIC FIELDS AND SEMANTIC CHANGES WITHIN THE CINEMA-RELATED VOCABULARY

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Abstract

The present study investigates the relationship between the cinema-related vocabulary and everyday language, by focusing on the main semantic changes that underlie the names of best-known film festivals and awards, as well as on the semantic fields they valorise. The relation should be understood as a two-way process, which involves shifts from both everyday language to the cinematic terminology, and vice versa. The examples analysed tend to favour three semantic changes (metaphor, metonymy and antonomasia), and three semantic fields (the animal, the vegetal and the chromatic field). Some non-prototypical uses of cinematic words and phrases are also referred to. However, both prototypical and non-prototypical uses of such words and phrases converge to demonstrate that the cinematic terminology is rather weak and is frequently open to lexicalisation, with possible shifts from common sense knowledge to common place and sometimes cliché.

Key-words: *antonomasia, metaphor, metonymy, semantic change, semantic field*

Résumé

La présente étude examine la relation entre le vocabulaire assimilé à la cinématographie et le vocabulaire quotidien, se concentrant sur les principaux changements sémantiques qui sous-tendent les plus connus noms de festivals de film et prix, ainsi que sur les champs sémantiques qu'ils font valoir. La relation doit se comprendre comme un processus doublement orienté, qui implique en même temps des glissements du vocabulaire quotidien vers la terminologie de la cinématographie et vice-versa. Les exemples analysés tendent à favoriser trois figures sémantiques (la métaphore, la métonymie et l'antonomase) et trois champs lexico-sémantique (animal, végétal et chromatique). On fait aussi référence à certaines utilisations non prototypiques des mots et expressions de la cinématographie. Cependant, tant les utilisations prototypiques que celles non prototypiques de ces mots et expressions convergent pour démontrer que la

¹ A prize awarded in France for Excellence in Francophone Cinema.

terminologie de la cinématographie est plutôt faible et sujette à la lexicalisation, par des glissements possibles des connaissances de base aux lieux communs et parfois aux clichés.

Mots-clés: *antonomase, métaphore, métonymie, figure sémantique, champ lexico-sémantique*

1. Introductory remarks

The first half of the title is a wink at a 1974 French movie called “Vincent, François, Paul et les autres”, based on Claude Néron’s novel “La grandemarrade” („Marea lehamite”/“Utter Disgust”), and directed by Claude Sautet. The cast features the names of Yves Montand, Michel Piccoli, Gérard Depardieu and Serge Reggiani, among others. The latter plays the part of Paul, a writer who has run out of inspiration. The script gave rise to a song interpreted by the same Serge Reggiani, the following year. Its name is “La chanson de Paul”, and has Jean-Loup Dabadie as the author of the lyrics (he also wrote the script of the movie), and Alain Goraguer, as the author of music. This short story is meant to draw attention to the correlations between different areas of knowledge, such as literature, cinema, music, and everyday experience, which may point to the existence of cross-domain (and also cross-cultural) shifts.

For current purposes, I will restrict my investigation to the relation between the cinematic vocabulary and everyday language, by analysing the semantic changes the former undergoes, which are no longer recognised by the speakers (that is, they turn into catachresis). Festival names and awards that are based on toponyms or expressions assimilated to them (including acronyms such as TIFFF – Transylvania International Film Festival, BAFTA – British Academy of Film and Television Awards) do not fall under the scope of this paper, since they are mere denotative devices, meant to just indicate the precise area (country or town) a certain festival/award originates.

The paper aims to prove that the cinematic terminology has become ‘common sense’ knowledge and is open to lexicalisation. In order to reach this goal, some highly conventional metaphors and metonymies will be analysed, and more precisely the metaphor or metonymy-based names of best-known film festivals and awards, such as the Oscars, the Césars, The Golden Lion/Bear/Raspberry, with possible shifts from the basic meanings, which mainly result from re-contextualisation. The examples will also prove that ‘common sense’ knowledge can easily turn into common place or even cliché.

2. Semantic changes within the cinema-related vocabulary

The analysis of the best-known movie awards and festival names shows the inclination towards the use of semantic changes (tropes), such as metaphor, metonymy and antonomasia, and the existence of fuzzy boundaries between them. The traditional (rhetorical) approach to metaphor defines it as a mere decorative device consisting in the substitution of a literal term with a nonliteral one. Further distinctions should be made between metaphor and metonymy, in that they involved different types of underlying operations: resemblance/correlation, in the case of metaphor (the elements are conceptually far from each other, although one can infer some similarities based on correlations in experience), and contiguity/proximity, in the case of metonymy, which implies talking about something in terms of something else that is closely associated to it, as a result of the elements being conceptually close to each other. In recent years, Western researchers (Kovecses 2006, Semino 2008) have widened the scope of metonymy², by including the relation between the parts and the whole previously associated with the synecdoche (a hierarchical category). The same is true for antonomasia, which has become a subtype of the "PART FOR THE WHOLE" metonymy, namely "A MEMBER FOR THE CATEGORY". Actually, antonomasia has a quite controversial status, since some researchers tend to still consider it a subclass of synecdoche ("SPECIES FOR THE GENUS"), which in turn, is a special type of metonymy³.

Consequently, a classification of metonymy would comprise two general configurations⁴: the "WHOLE AND ITS PARTS" configuration and the "PART AND PART" configuration, both with different subtypes. However, not all of them are relevant to my approach, so I will only refer to the ones which underlie the names of international movie awards and festivals under discussion. Within the "WHOLE AND ITS PARTS" configuration, two subtypes will be discussed: the "PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT" and "A MEMBER FOR THE CATEGORY" metonymies. The latter may be regarded as an antonomasia, since it involves a paragon, that is, an individual who has achieved the status of a prototype for the

² Unlike synecdoche, which involves hierarchical relations (*pars pro toto-totum pro parte*), metonymy is based on replacing quantitative equivalents (*pars pro parte*). (DSL/DLS – *Dictionary of Language Sciences*, p. 314).

³ This type of circularity can be found in DSL/DLS (*Dictionary of Language Sciences*), s.v. *antonomază* (*antonomasia* – pp. 60-61), which points to *sinecdocă* (*synecdoche* – p. 480) and eventually to *metonimie* (*metonymy* – pp. 313-314). Also, the classical rhetoric works refer to antonomasia as a type of synecdoche whereby a common name is taken as a proper name, and vice versa (Du Marsais 1981). See also Stoichițoiu- Ichim (2006: 329-355) for a different approach, where *antonomasia* is used as an umbrella term which incapsulates metonymic and/or metaphorical shifts. In her opinion, the use of a proper name as a common noun is exemplary-based and involves a paragon, which results in a broadening of meaning (generalising antonomasia), as opposed to the use of common nouns as proper names, which results in a narrowing/particularisation of meaning.

⁴ Kovecses 2006: 100-104.

class (as proved by the existence of phrases like *the French Oscars*). Symmetrically, the “PART AND PART” configuration will bring into focus other two subtypes of metonymy: “CAUSE FOR THE EFFECT” (the use of *Palme d’Or* with a rather non-standard meaning, to evoke a recent incident involving French president, Emmanuel Macron⁵) and “SYMBOL FOR THE OBJECT” (as in the *Golden Bear/Lion; Palme d’Or*).

3. From everyday language to cinema. Names of international movie awards and festivals

Nominal expressions such as *Oscar, César, Lumière, The Golden Lion, The Golden Bear, The Golden Raspberry, and Palm d’Or* can be grouped together as they all designate international movie awards/festivals and are based on everyday knowledge (real people or objects), but are more or less different in their linguistic structure (both at the formal and the semantic level).

As regards the name *Oscar*, three possible interpretations could be taken into account: metaphor (similarity-based conceptualisation), metonymy, or antonomasia.

The first interpretation is accounted for by a shift from the animate to the inanimate field, based on a physical resemblance between a person (named Oscar) and the appearance of the trophy. Concerning the human referent, two explanations appear as relevant: Margaret Herrick, the Academy librarian/executive director, found some similarity with her uncle and her cousin, both named Oscar (Levy 2004: 45). According to another hypothesis, Bette Davis thought the statue resembled her late husband, Harmon Oscar Nelson Jr., so she proposed this name to honour his memory (*Ibidem*). Yet, irrespective of the two proposed human referents, it was not until 1939 that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences officially adopted the nickname *Oscar*, following the insistence of a Hollywood columnist by the name of Sidney Skolsky. Stoichițoiu-Ichim (2006: 337) refers to such cases as examples of antonomasia based on metaphorical shift. It is worth mentioning, however, that here at least the condition of the referent’s “notoriety” is not met, so the referential process is rather opaque⁶.

The metonymic interpretation is based on the fact that *Oscar* designates both the worldwide famous trophy and the best-known cinema award, dating back to 1929. To put it in Stoichițoiu-Ichim’s terms (2006: 333-334), one can speak here of an antonomasia based on metonymic shift, the name of the award designating the trophy (as in *The Oscar goes to...*), rather than the “PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT” type, since the creator’s name is not Oscar, but George (Stanley).

⁵ See below, Section 4.

⁶ Semino (2008: 21) speaks of opaque metaphorical meanings (because the scenario underlying them is no longer familiar to the users), as opposed to transparent metaphorical meanings, which can be arrived at on the basis of general world knowledge.

Another metonymic use (“A MEMBER FOR THE CATEGORY”/antonomasia) can be found in the case of examples whereby the César Awards are referred to by the locution *the French Oscars*, pointing to the fact that the Oscars have become a landmark in the film industry.

César relates to *Oscar* in three different ways, one of which is extra-linguistic, the other two being placed at the phonetic and the semantic levels, respectively. Not only do the names sound quite similar (the phonetic resemblance is to be understood in terms of assonance), but the trophies they designate also look quite similar, in that the César trophy consists of a reel of film encircling a silhouette which evokes that of the Oscar trophy. At the semantic level, both names are based on a semantic shift, pointing to a (real) person, yet in different ways: *via* metaphor, followed by a metonymy “NAME OF THE AWARD FOR THE TROPHY”, or “A MEMBER FOR THE CATEGORY”/antonomasia), in the case of Oscar, and *via* metonymy “PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT”, in the case of César. The name of the latter trophy comes from its creator, the sculptor César Baldaccini, and is also a hint at Jules Auguste Muraire, also known as Raimu, who played the part of César in the Marseille trilogy (*Marius, Fanny and César*), by Marcel Pagnol.

Concerning the *Lumière* Prize, awarded for Excellence in Francophone Cinema, the explanation is also metonymy-based, evoking the names of the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, who are traditionally regarded as the creators of cinema, since they were the first to present a projected film, back in 1895.

Noun phrases like *The Golden Bear* and *The Golden Lion* represent loan translations (from the German *Goldenen Bär*, and the Italian *Leone d’Oro*, respectively), while *Palme d’Or* is an international borrowing. Despite having different etymologies, they share the determiner (*golden/Goldenen/d’Oro/d’Or*) and are all based on iconicity⁷, so one can speak of a metonymy “SYMBOL FOR THE OBJECT”: the bear and the lion are featured on the flags of Berlin and Venice, respectively, and have a symbolic value. Similarly, the palm tree is the symbol of Cannes and has then become the symbol of the Film Festival hosted there. The image of the French Award makes use of the ambiguity between *palm*₁ (palm tree leaf) and *palm*₂ (part of the arm). The linguistic expressions quoted above resort to

⁷A theoretical framework that comes to mind is Charles Peirce's triadic theory of signs (*apud* Chandler 2007: 36-37), postulating the existence of three different ways by means of which the form of the sign (the signifier) might relate to the object or event in the world it refers to (the signified). Peirce distinguishes between three kinds of signs: the symbol, the icon, and the index. The icon refers to the way in which the signifier resembles or imitates the signified. The symbol indicates the way in which the signifier, following its arbitrary and conventional form, does not resemble the signified, whereas the index reflects to the way in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way to the signified. The linguistic expressions quoted in the body of the text have a causal relation to what they denote, rather than a merely conventional one (Coëgnarts 2019: 298).

some semantic fields: the animal/vegetal field, represented by the nominal heads *bear*, *lion*, and *palm*, respectively, and the chromatic field, here in the form of the so-called *referential structure*⁸, that is, chromatic terms obtained from the name of the referent, by derivational means (*gold* + suffix *-en*, showing the material and the origin, at the same time). The choice of the noun *gold* as a derivational basis for the adjective *golden* is quite easy to explain, since it is an instantiation of an exemplar-based categorisation, the gold being perceived as the most precious material, and thus indicating the highest distinction. The derogatory meaning attached to the metaphor *the Golden Raspberry* (the name of a category awarded to the worst movies) originates in the use of some informal English expressions such as *to blow a raspberry*, intended to insult someone or to make fun of them. Note that the determiner, *golden*, is preserved to indicate superlative, yet on the negative side.

4. From cinema to everyday language. Non-prototypical uses of cinema-related vocabulary

Words and expressions like *Hollywood*, *Oscar(s)*, *Palme d'Or*, etc. are not only cultural, but also cross-cultural products, since they reflect shared, 'common sense' ways of talking and thinking about particular topics, with a possible shift from common sense to common place and cliché. Consequently, the cinema-related vocabulary may be used in a non-prototypical way, *via* metonymy and antonomasia. The latter is to be understood as a two-way change, which involves shifts from both proper names— toponyms (like *Hollywood*) or anthroponyms (like *Oscar*, *César*, etc.) — to common nouns, and vice versa. It is worth mentioning though that the first move is far more frequent than the second, and involves a shift from an individual to a class, thus corresponding to a broadening of meaning/generalising antonomasia (which sometimes turns into the so-called "objectualisation"⁹). The opposite move, illustrated by examples like *Golden Lion/Bear*, *Palme d'Or*, triggers opposite effects, that is a narrowing/particularisation of meaning, which is also accounted for by the use of the metaphorical determiner, and represents the main way cinematic words and phrases re-enter everyday language.

Quite often though, metaphorical expressions are highly conventional, which means that their metaphoricity is no longer perceived by the users. It follows that the more conventional a metaphorical expression, the less likely it is it will be consciously used and recognised as a metaphor (Semino 2008: 19). Interestingly enough, sometimes even highly conventional figurative expressions have the potential to be consciously recognised as metaphorical/metonymic, by means of the so-called revitalisation of metaphor/metonymy (Goatly 1997: 276-277, *apud*

⁸ Bidu-Vrănceanu, Forăscu (2005:156).

⁹ Zafiu (2001: 61).

Semino 2008: 20). The creative extension of such conventional expressions aims at achieving humorous effects by the exploitation of vagueness and ambiguity (Semino 2008: 84-85). For instance, the expression *Palme d'Or* has been recently used to refer to an incident which involved French president, Emmanuel Macron, who was slapped by a man in the audience. This gave rise to a series of caricatures depicting the president with a swollen eye. The image was accompanied by a short comment saying: *Palme d'Or*. The humorous effects of the expression are triggered by the use of both intertextuality and polysemy: the former hints at the name of the prize awarded at the Cannes Festival, whereas the latter implies the reactivation of the literal meaning of the word *palme* (*palm*), accompanied by a metonymy "EFFECT FOR THE CAUSE"/"INSTRUMENT FOR THE ACTIVITY", following the diachronic reconversion of a figurative expression into basic mental representations of the human sensorimotor experience (the act of slapping someone: palm stands for hitting¹⁰). By resorting to such expressions, the speaker achieves two goals: accessibility, ensured by the conventional basis of metaphor, on the one hand, and vividness and humorous effects (consisting in the metaphorical punning/the 'revitalisation of metaphor/metonymy'), by simultaneously activating literal and figurative meanings, on the other hand (Semino 2008: 8-9). In this particular case, the figurative meaning was both topic-triggered (evoked by the name of the award) and situation-triggered (activated by an element in the communicative situation as a result of re-contextualisation). It exploits and reinforces existing non-figurative associations and consequently adds rhetorical strength to the arguments, by blurring the boundary between the literal and the non-literal meanings of the expression and by activating particular inferences, evaluations, emotional associations, etc. (Semino 2008: 106).

However, non-prototypical uses of cinematic words and phrases are not limited to intra-class shifts, from proper names to common nouns and the reverse (by antonomasia). They may involve common nouns only, used metaphorically, like in the (conceptual) metaphor LIFE IS A STAGE/MOVIE/FILM/PLAY/SHOW¹¹, whereby everyday experience is referred to *via* a cinema-related term. This is a highly conventional cross-cultural metaphor, as proved by the numerous linguistic expressions that derive from it, which are seldom associated with figurative meanings: *it's curtains for him/her; to be in the spotlight; to steal/save the show; (not) to be in the script; to play a part; standing ovations; wait in the wings, casting, one man/woman show*, etc. The LIFE IS A STAGE/MOVIE/FILM/PLAY / SHOW metaphor displays a certain circularity: it originates in literature, having been popularised by Shakespeare (*As You Like It*), in the 16th century Europe

¹⁰ "THE BODY PART FOR ITS TYPICAL FUNCTIONS" metonymy.

¹¹ One can also think of other metaphors, such as LIFE EXCEEDS FILM ("VIAȚA BATE FILMUL").

(Kovecses 2006: 144): *All the world is a stage,/And all the men and women merely players./They have their exits and their entrances/And one man in his time plays many parts.*

Nonetheless, Shakespeare is said to have just mirrored the reality of his time, when public life very much resembled a performance, whereby people presented the self they wanted to be perceived by the others. This brings forward the ideas of masks (and the pragmatic concept of *face*) and role- playing. The metaphor also permeated the Romanian literature of the 19th century and many other literatures. It re-entered real life, and was revisited and reinforced in early 20th century America, along with a shift from a primarily “character-oriented” to a “personality-oriented” culture in the American context (Gabler 1998, *apud* Kovecses 2006: 145). Interestingly, English uses one word – *character* – to designate both a moral trait (values like integrity and courage, typical of the old Puritan production-oriented culture) and an actor, whereas Romanian expresses the latter value by means of a French borrowing (rom. *personaj* > fr. *personage*). In various English dictionaries, *character* displays a rich polysemy, the basic meaning being the one used in psychology, that is, the qualities of a person that combine so as to form their **personality**. From this definition, one can infer a relation of hyponymy between *character* and *personality*, which lays at the basis of other derived meanings, such as: identity, nature; reputation, good name; **personality** in relation to how honest and reliable someone is (which corresponds to the first meaning of *character* in the Puritan era); strength; atmosphere (a special, interesting, and unusual quality of an object, which makes one notice or like it). The meaning used in the cinematic field is cited on the ninth position in Collins Cobuild Dictionary, and is explained by reference to the people that the film/play (or book) is about¹². The same meaning is further explained in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, which refers to a part played by an actor, and continues by indicating the etymology of the word: it originates in Middle English (in the sense of “distinctive mark”, later “feature or trait”), from Old French *caractère*, via Latin from Greek *kharactèr* (“a stamping tool”, which seems to point to a salient trait/feature). Regarding the use of *personage* in English, it activates a different meaning than its Romanian counterpart, more precisely, it designates a famous or important person; a person expressing their importance or elevated status. Note that the word is monosemic in both dictionaries I have used, and has its origin in Middle English from Old French, reinforced by Medieval Latin *personagium* (“effigy”). The definitions quoted above seem to indicate that English tends to cancel the difference we make in Romanian between *personage* and *personality*, the latter being used to refer to a famous

¹² There are also some other meanings that are not relevant for the discussion, that is why they do not appear in the body of the text.

person. This is consistent with the second interpretation of *character* in the new consumerist era, which highlighted traits such as charm, fascination and likability, whereby a personality was considered to be a performer, or a performing self (Gabler 1998, *apud* Kovecses 2006: 146). It is worth mentioning that later on, the LIFE IS A STAGE/MOVIE/FILM/PLAY/SHOW metaphor permeated pop culture, too (Elvis Presley: *Act one was when we met*, or Frank Sinatra: *And now I face the final curtain*).

5. Concluding remarks

The names of best-known film festivals and awards valorise three semantic fields: the animal, the vegetal, and the chromatic field. The first two fields are centred on the nominal heads: *bear/lion*, on the one hand, and *palm/raspberry*, on the other, whereas the chromatic field is restricted to one colour, yellow, expressed indirectly, by grammatical means (the French *Palme d'Or* and the Italian *Leone d'Oro*) or by derivational means, in the form of the determiner *golden* (<*gold* + suffix *-en*, as in *The Golden Bear/Lion/Raspberry*). The choice of colour is not random, since it is exemplar-based and involves both cross-culturally and temporarily stable exemplars (Kovecses 2006: 33); it is also accounted for by the positive connotations attached to it, such as richness/highest standard (since gold has long been perceived as the most precious material, so it stands for the highest distinction). It is worth mentioning that the negative connotations of a linguistic expression like the *Golden Raspberry* derive from an informal expression (*to blow a raspberry*). The choice of nominal heads, the bear and the lion (within *The Golden Bear/Lion*) is based on the symbolic value the respective animals have in relation to Berlin and Venice, respectively: the bear is the heraldic animal of Berlin, whereas the (winged) lion is the heraldic symbol of Venice (the full name of the festival used to be *The Golden Lion of Saint Mark*). Similarly, the palm tree is the symbol of Cannes and has later become the symbol of the Film Festival hosted there, as well, by way of metonymy.

Although initially culture-specific, some cinema-related words and phrases originating mainly in the American space have settled in the collective unconscious *via* catachresis, that is by semantic changes (metaphor, metonymy, antonomasia) which are no longer perceived as deviant from the literal meaning. They are instances of the stylistic neology since their use is not forced upon by a “gap” in the lexicon, but is the result of a choice made by the speaker(s). Consequently, the referential value of such words and expressions is of secondary importance, as there are alternative choices to express the same content (Stoichițoiu-Ichim 2001: 63). Moreover, given that such shifts often trigger a broadening and – less frequently – a narrowing of meaning, denominative neology is not to be completely discarded.

Despite the fact that they occur as individual innovations (see the case of Oscar), such words and phrases are open to lexicalization and enjoy (near) universal status, since they reflect conventional patterns of thinking. As a matter of fact, frequency and expressiveness seem to be in reverse ratio to one another, in that the more frequent a word/phrase, the less expressive it becomes. The extreme case is represented by the transformation of former figures of speech into commonsense knowledge and possibly even commonplace or cliché. That means they become not only common, but also universal, as a result of interlinguistic synonymy. The ‘universalisation’ of a certain part of the cinematic terminology is proved by the creation of port-manteau words like *Bollywood* (obtained by blending *Bombay* and *Hollywood*), the emergent meaning of which would be “the Indian Hollywood”, as well as by the fact that the César awards are sometimes referred to by the expression *the French Oscars*, via antonomasia (by means of which a prototypical member of the category stands for the whole category). The same trait is accounted for by the great number and variety of expressions using cinema-related vocabulary that have permeated various languages by international loans or phraseological calque and are used in everyday situations: *it’s curtains for him/her* (“a cădea/ a se lăsa cortina”, used to express the final stage of an action, or the idea of someone’s death), *to be in the spotlight* (“a fi în lumina reflectoarelor”, that is, to be visible, to stand out), *to steal/save the show* (“a fura/salva spectacolul/show-ul”), *to be in the script* (“a fi în scenariu”, that is, to have been thought about), *to play a part* (“a juca un rol”, meaning to have a certain impact on someone’s life/activity), *standing ovations* (“urale în picioare”, used to convey the idea of huge success), *one man/woman show* (with no Romanian equivalent by now, used to refer to a man/woman who “steals the show”, by drawing complete attention to themselves), or even *to show off* (“a se da mare”, that is to give oneself airs).

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