

PERSONIFICATION AND EMBODIMENT IN “THE BOTTLE NECK” (*FLASKENHALSEN*) BY H. C. ANDERSEN AND ITS TRANSLATIONS INTO ENGLISH, LATVIAN AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract

In his monograph *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (2006), Raymond Gibbs points out that many aspects of language and communication arise from, and continue to be guided by, bodily experience, as the human mind is embodied, and embodied experience structures thought. As a result, numerous terms across a variety of languages reflect understanding of things in terms of the human body or its parts, which also serves as evidence of metaphoricality. The present research aims to outline the link between personification, i.e. understanding of inanimate objects in terms of living things, which is an integral part of the mind shaped by culture [Lakoff, Johnson 1980], and embodiment, i.e. understanding of the role of an agent's body in its cognition. Both are present in the short story “The Bottle Neck” (*Flaskenhalsen*) by Hans Christian Andersen, which proves an interesting challenge to translators. As the main character of the story is alive, personification becomes an extended and the most important stylistic technique in the work. The translations into English, Latvian and Russian serve as exciting illustrations of cultural and linguistic differences, which emerge when the translators have to deal with personification and embodiment in the original text.

Keywords: *personification, embodiment, Andersen, cognitive linguistics.*

Since the rise of cognitive linguistics in the 1980s, numerous studies have been devoted to metaphor as a pervasive technique in thought and language. Metaphor has been viewed in a variety of contexts and forms. The most important achievement in cognitive linguistics is, perhaps, the discovery of conceptual metaphor, an abstract category for metaphors of a certain kind, outlined by Lakoff and Johnson

in their fundamental work *Metaphors We Live By*. Conceptual metaphors are many and differ across languages and cultures; however, the term itself refers to a universal technique of the human mind, i.e. understanding of one thing in terms of another. This discovery has influenced all subsequent studies of figurative language. Some other stylistic techniques, such as metonymy and personification, have been discussed from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), as it has proved convenient to analyse them as interactions of different experiential domains, i.e. the target and the source. The present article focuses on personification. Andersen's story "The Bottle Neck" (*Flaskenhalsen*) serves as interesting empirical material for analysis.

Within the framework of CMT, personification is generally understood as a kind of conceptual metaphor. Thus, Kövecses even introduces the conceptual metaphor INANIMATE OBJECTS ARE PEOPLE [Kövecses 2002: 58]. As suggested in *Metaphors We Live By*, personifications "are extensions of ontological metaphors", "... they allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms – terms that we can understand on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics" [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 34]. In other words, personification has an ontological function in language and thought. If we need to reason about the existence of something, we do so from a human perspective, and the primary and most important form of existence to humans is life.

The most accessible evidence of life is its physical manifestation, which happens to be the (human) body. It is only natural that inanimate objects are often conceptualised as parts of the human body that perform similar functions or have similar physical features. Such expressions as "the eye of a needle", "the leg of a chair", "the hand of a clock", and "the neck of a bottle" are metaphorical mappings of different parts of the human body onto the corresponding objects. The hand of a clock, for instance, shows the time, i.e. performs the task of showing that can also be performed by a person using their hand. Similarly, the leg of a chair performs the action of standing. The neck of a bottle seems to bear physical resemblance to the neck of a human. Similarly, the eye of a needle is a round hole, which is what the human eye basically is. These are all examples of the so-called body metaphors, which generally fall into two categories depending on the kind of mapping that occurs in them: 1) concrete – concrete (the examples above), 2) abstract – concrete (e.g., "the head of a company", "the heart of the city", etc.).

I believe that personification is closely linked to the notion of embodiment, which has also been discussed in cognitive linguistics in the form of criticism of rational and objectivist thought [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 195–209, Johnson 1987, Gibbs 2005: 1–12 etc.]. Embodiment is the term that is used in cognitive science to refer to "understanding the role of an agent's own body in its everyday, situated

cognition" [Gibbs 2005: 1]. For instance, "being flexible", "balancing" etc. are metaphorical expressions that describe the activity of the human body while referring to the emotional or mental state of the speaker, as described by Gibbs [op. cit.: 1–2]. The body metaphors in the previous paragraph do not necessarily illustrate speakers' awareness of the human body; however, they indicate its role in the creation of these terms.

The main issue regarding embodied experience is that the human body and its role have been traditionally ignored or rejected in Western thought in the name of objectivity. This has led to a disembodied and warped view of the human mind. Language, however, reflects thought naturally. Non-academic language is particularly rich in expressions that are grounded in embodied experience, which is why they may naturally emerge in conscious linguistic practices, such as translation. It is important, though, to differentiate between those metaphorical expressions that are grounded in embodied experience, body metaphors and actual personifications. Not all of the body metaphors qualify as personifications. The expressions "the eye of a needle", "the leg of a chair", "the hand of a clock", and "the neck of a bottle" are indeed figurative; however, these are not examples of personification, as we do not normally conceptualise needles, chairs, bottles, or clocks as living beings. "The heart of the city", however, implies that we treat the city as an independent organism, something that is beyond our control. The seeming paradox in "The Bottle Neck" by Andersen is in the fact that if a bottle has a neck¹, it does not make it alive. However, that is exactly what happens in the story.

"The Bottle Neck" is an empathetic allegory. First published in 1857, it is a story about the life of a bottle, starting from its creation and ending with its old days [Andersen 1857]. Being the main character, the bottle is a humanised object. This results in an extended personification, which is the main stylistic and narrative technique in the story. The terms "mouth" and "neck" are no longer merely mappings of human body parts; they are parts of the bottle's body. The following excerpt from Paull's English translation illustrates that:

"Yes, you may sing very well, you have all your limbs uninjured; you should feel what it is like to lose your **body**, and only have a **neck** and a **mouth** left, with a cork stuck in it, as I have: you wouldn't sing then, I know" [Andersen 1872].

As personification is seen as a kind of conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics, it seems possible to view extended personification in the same way as extended metaphor. Naciscione defines extended metaphor as "an entrenched

¹ Interestingly, there are many other terms in English that refer to parts of a bottle by mapping parts of the human body onto them, e.g., heel, shoulder, mouth etc.

stylistic pattern of both thought and language, reflecting extended figurative thought. It is a cognitive inference tool, applicable in new figurative thought instantiations” [Naciscione 2016: 241]. Similarly to extended metaphor, extended personification “...sustains a narrative and creates a metaphorical continuum, a network of associative strings, constituting part of the same metaphorical application. Sustainability is secured by recourse to the base metaphor over successive phrases and sentences, or over longer stretches of text” [op. cit.: 254]. According to Naciscione’s classification, it is the 3rd type of extended metaphor that is present in the story, which implies “extension of two or several notional base constituents” [op. cit.: 247], i.e. the bottle as an object (source domain) and the bottle as a human (target domain). Consider some examples of extended personification that occur in English, Latvian and Russian translations (the source sub-images are underlined; the target sub-images are in bold):

- 1) He thought of the blazing furnace in the factory, where he had been **blown into life**; he remembered how hot it felt when he was placed in the heated oven, the **home** from which he sprang...
 - 2) He had been placed in a row, with a whole **regiment of his brothers and sisters** all brought out of the same furnace...
 - 3) When the bottles were packed our bottle was packed amongst them; it little expected then to finish its **career** as a bottle neck...
 - 4) There it lay empty, and without a cork, and it had a peculiar feeling, as if it **wanted something** it knew not what.
 - 5) At last it was filled with rich and costly wine, a cork was placed in it, and sealed down. Then it was labelled “first quality”, as if it had carried off the **first prize at an examination**.
 - 6) The bottle could never after that forget the performance of that moment; indeed there was quite a **convulsion** within him as the cork flew out... [Andersen 1872].
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- 1) Viņš atcerējās kvēlojošo cepli un stikla pūtēju, kas bija viņā **iepūtis dzīvību**.
 - 2) Pudele bija tukša un viņš – bez korķa, un tam likās, it kā **kaut kā trūktu**. Bet kā trūka, to viņš nezināja.
 - 3) Tad tam iebāza mutē korķi, uzlēja virsū laku un uz pudeles rumpja uzlīmēja etiķeti ar uzrakstu “Pirmā labuma”. Pudelei bija tikpat labi kā skolniekam, kad tas **licībā dabūjis lielisku atzīmi** [Andersens [2003] 2015].
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- 1) Оно вспоминало огненную печь на стеклянном заводе, где в бутылку **вдунули жизнь**, помнило, как **горяча** была **молодая** бутылка, как она смотрела в бурлящую плавильную печь – **место своего рождения**...

- 2) Но мало-помалу она **остыла** и вполне **примирилась** с своим новым положением.
- 3) Она стояла в ряду других **братьев и сестер**. Их был тут **целый полк!** Все они вышли из одной печки.
- 4) Все бутылки были упакованы; наша бутылка тоже; тогда она и не предполагала еще, что кончит в виде бутылочного горлышка **в должности** стаканчика для птички...
- 5) Бутылка лежала **пустая**, без пробки, и **ощущала в желудке** какую-то **пустоту**, ей как будто **чего-то недоставало**, а чего – она и сама не знала.
- 6) Но вот ее налили чудесным вином, закупорили и запечатали сургучом, а сбоку наклеили **ярлычок: “Первый сорт”**. Бутылка как будто получила **высшую отметку на экзамене**.
- 7) Бутылка никогда уже не могла забыть той торжественной минуты, когда **пробку** из нее **точно вышибло** и у нее вырвался **глубокий вздох облегчения...** [Андерсен 1899].

In the examples above, one can see a number of sub-images that contribute to the base personification BOTTLE IS HUMAN. They are represented more concisely in the table below.

Table. **Base personification BOTTLE IS HUMAN**

Base personification: BOTTLE IS HUMAN	
BOTTLE AS AN OBJECT (source)	BOTTLE AS A HUMAN (target)
Glass blowing	Blowing into life
Heated oven	Home, place of birth
To cool	To come to terms
Other bottles	Regiment of brothers and sisters
Functioning of the bottle	Career, position
Emptiness	Desire for something, lacking in something
The label “Best Quality”	First prize at an examination, top grade
Uncorking of the bottle	Convulsion, a deep sigh of relief
Hot	Young (hot-tempered)

Thus, a number of phenomena related to the creation and functioning of bottles are viewed from a human perspective, i.e. the other bottles are understood

as brothers and sisters, the heated oven is understood as home [Andersen 1872] or place of birth [Андерсен 1899], etc. The term “bottleneck” has a double function in all the translations. It remains a body metaphor in the array of source sub-images and functions as an independent sub-image in the target domain. Not all the source sub-images are present in the text. For example, glass blowing is only hinted at. Some target sub-images are added by translators so as to sustain the bottle’s independence as a character and a living being. Paull refers to the experience of uncorking of the bottle as a convulsion; Hansen (Ганзен) sees it as a deep sigh of relief. These are examples of embodied experience of the bottle as a human, created using the linguistic means of target languages. Hersholt’s translation, which is considered close to the original text, has no such additions:

“The Bottleneck could never forget that solemn moment; it said “pop!” as the cork was pulled out...” [Andersen 1949].

Another example of embodied experience that was added for the above-mentioned reason is the use of the word “hot” together with “young” in the Russian translation, a common collocation in Russian to refer to hot-tempered youth. Similarly, Hansen uses the word “to cool” as a pun to refer to the cooling of the bottle and to its coming to terms with the circumstances.

Similarly, all the translations refer to the emptiness of the bottle as source (physical emptiness of a container) and target (longing for something or lacking in something) sub-images.

It is necessary to stress that the Latvian translation omits a great number of original personifications. This may not necessarily be the translator’s fault, as the text in Latvian, which is based on the 1947 translation, has been adapted for school children (according to the Latvian National Library catalogue, the translator is not indicated in the 1947 publication). This explains the scant number of examples of personification in the Latvian text. However, it seems far from being a justifiable editorial strategy in 2015, as children think in figurative terms, just as adults do. It is not clear why schoolchildren should be deprived of Andersen’s magic and figurativeness in the text. On the contrary, raising stylistic awareness has substantial educational value.

The examples analysed indicate that body metaphors, personification and embodiment interact and contribute to the figurative network devised by Andersen in his story. Lakoff and Turner suggest that “[t]he process of personification illustrates what is perhaps the most impressive of the powers of metaphorical thought: the power to create, with naturalness and ease” [Lakoff, Turner 1989: 80]. The figurative network in “The Bottle Neck” is indeed the result of such creativity. Considering that literary writing and translation are conscious linguistic activities, one may wonder if such a network exists in language in general. If so, it should

be a matter of further investigations in cognitive linguistics, as all these linguistic phenomena are related to our major concern – life. Moreover, personification is part and parcel of human culture, which had been noticed long before cognitive linguistics. In Huizinga’s words: “There is no question of first conceiving something as lifeless and bodiless and then expressing it as something that has body, parts and passions. No; the thing perceived is conceived as having life and movement in the first place, and such is the primary expression of it, which is no afterthought. Personification in this sense arises as soon as the need is felt to communicate one’s perceptions to others” [Huizinga 1949: 141].

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