

Eureka Journal of Language, Culture & Social Change (EJLCSC)

ISSN 2760-4926 (Online) Volume 2, Issue 6, June 2026



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HOW COMPARISON INFLUENCES THE SUBCONSCIOUS: THE ROLE OF SIMILE IN HYPNOTIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This article explores the role of simile as a central mechanism of hypnotic discourse from a cognitive and psycholinguistic perspective. Building on insights from cognitive linguistics, neurolinguistics, and suggestive linguistics, the study argues that figurative language in hypnotic communication does not merely decorate speech but structures how experience is construed and transformed. Through qualitative analysis of hypnotic and psychotherapeutic texts in Uzbek and Russian, the paper demonstrates how similes grounded in sensory experience and body-based imagery facilitate the re-interpretation of emotions and internal states. The findings suggest that simile operates as implicit suggestive strategy which guides attention, reduce resistance, and influence decision-making at a subconscious level.

Keywords: Hypnotic discourse, simile, influence on subconscious, suggestion

Introduction

Thinking is a human activity of perceiving and understanding the surrounding world, and this process is formed directly through comparison, that is, by correlating and contrasting, because a person cannot perceive any new object or phenomenon without comparing it with the knowledge, experience, or image

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already existing in his or her mind. From this perspective, comparison appears as the basic mechanism of thinking, as the foundation of cognitive activity.

Comparison is the factor that unites all the main mental operations of thinking, such as analysis, synthesis, generalization, and classification. Any type of mental operation, in its essence, relies on comparing two or more phenomena with one another. Simile and metaphor are also considered to be the result of this very cognitive process.

From the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics, human thinking operates through a conceptual map, that is, new knowledge being acquired is integrated into the existing conceptual system by means of comparison. Therefore, comparison can be interpreted as the starting point of thought and as the principal means of meaning construction.

Simile and metaphor are figurative forms of comparison that create diverse linguistic images aimed at making ideas in speech more expressive and memorable (Tedford, 1991). It is precisely through similes and metaphors based on comparison that the speaker gains the opportunity to enhance the persuasive power of his or her speech.

In hypnotic discourse, similes serve as a means of instilling new concepts, views, and habits in the listener by appealing to the images, symbols, and representations already present in his or her mind. Through comparison and its linguistic manifestations – similes the listener is directed toward analysing the information being provided and drawing conclusions based on that analysis. Presenting new information to the listener through a familiar concept ensures that this information is accepted easily and without resistance, which in turn increases the effectiveness of the verbal influence being exerted.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design grounded in descriptive, comparative, and interpretive linguistic analysis. The primary aim is to identify

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and evaluate similes functioning as suggestive devices in hypnotic discourse, with attention to their psycholinguistic mechanisms and communicative effects. The analysis is based on a corpus of hypnotic texts in Uzbek and Russian, including psychotherapeutic interventions and conversational hypnosis scripts. The corpus was compiled from publicly available audio-transcribed sessions, hypnotic scripts (<https://freehypnosiscripts.com/>) and authentic psychotherapeutic dialogues. Each text underwent multi-level linguistic analysis: a) semantic analysis, aimed at identifying conceptual mappings underlying similes; b) structural-syntactic analysis, focusing on comparative constructions; c) psychopragmatic analysis, assessing how figurative structures facilitate suggestion, reduce cognitive resistance, and activate sensory-emotional responses. The analysis also integrates findings from cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and neuroscientific studies on figurative language processing to interpret the persuasive and subconscious effects of figurative devices. The methodological approach thus allows for a comprehensive examination of how simile operates as a strategic tool in hypnotic influence and psychotherapeutic communication.

Hypnotic discourse

Hypnotic discourse denotes a structured form of verbal interaction in which hypnotic linguistic patterns are systematically applied to modulate the recipient's attentional focus, cognitive processing, and suggestibility levels. Hypnotic language influences the listener's subconscious through linguistic units and is aimed at modifying his or her behaviour and actions. Hypnotic language is used for specific purposes – providing psychological assistance, conducting psychotherapeutic interventions, and communicating with a patient. Research on hypnotic discourse (Burton, 2007; Burton & Brodenhamer, 2009; Karpenko, 2019) predominantly focuses on identifying, describing, and systematising the

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linguistic patterns that underlie hypnotic suggestion and contribute to its psycholinguistic effectiveness.

Simile

B. Dancygier considers simile to be a “construction” and acknowledges that the main characteristic of simile is its ability to ‘draw attention to itself’ and to prompt the reader or listener to view the described content from a ‘new, distinctive perspective’ (Dancygier, 2021). This approach demonstrates that a simile is not only a lexical or stylistic phenomenon, but also a complex syntactic-semantic structure. A simile may appear in the form of a phrase or a sentence, yet it embodies within itself a syntactic model that connects entities on the basis of semantic similarity. In this sense, Dancygier analyzes simile as a grammatical construction and evaluates it not merely as an aesthetic device but as a cognitive mechanism that presents an idea in a novel way.

By its nature, a simile is a means that re-conceptualises reality, evoking new associations in the reader’s imagination. In this regard, through simile, the author “reconstructs” the world through the filter of his or her own perception.

Results and discussions

In literary texts, similes as a stylistic device are used to adorn the language of fiction and to provide clarity and imagery of depiction. In hypnotic discourse, however, simile is not merely an embellishing tool; it is a powerful psychopragmatic means that directly affects the subconscious, activates imagination, and alters the listener’s emotional state and viewpoints.

For example, in the speech of psychologists, a person’s inner emotions are compared to objects or phenomena that can be seen or sensed through the sense organs, and by this, internal psychological states and emotions are conveyed to the listener more clearly and vividly:

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Bu yerda bilish kerakki, ayollarning ichida yig‘iladigan salbiy hissiyotlar qachondir yo‘l topib chiqib ketishi kerak. Xuddi vulqondan otilmoqchi bo‘lgan magma yer tagida to‘planib, qayerdandir chiqmoqchi bo‘ladi, yig‘ilib bo‘lgandan keyin pastki bosim shunaqangi kuchayib ketadiki, yuqoridagi bosim bemalol yorib chiqqa oladi va nogahon vulqon otiladi shunda. Xuddi shu narsa ayollarda ham bo‘ladi, ya’ni eriga bo‘ladigan salbiy hissiyotlar, nafrat, tajovuz, xafachilik, alamlar – barchasini ayol kishi yig‘ib yurarkan. Yillar davomida yig‘ib yuradi va o‘sha yig‘ilgan hissiyotlarni farzandiga chiqaradi // Here it must be understood that the negative emotions accumulated inside women must eventually come out and find a way to be released. Just as the magma that is about to erupt from a volcano accumulates beneath the earth and seeks an outlet somewhere. Once the accumulation is complete, the lower pressure becomes so strong that it can easily break through the upper layer, and then the volcano erupts suddenly. The same thing happens with women: the negative emotions, hatred, aggression, resentment, and hurt they feel toward their husbands – all of these are accumulated by a woman. She continues to accumulate them for years, and eventually she releases that accumulated emotional burden onto her child.

It is precisely through the use of simile that the listener, the person seeking help from the psychologist, attempts to understand his or her own emotions and forms in the imagination a connection between the psychological state and a natural phenomenon. The idea that continuously suppressing one’s inner emotions may ultimately lead to an emotional “explosion,” and that, as a result of this explosion, the woman’s own child may suffer, is expressed more clearly and vividly through the simile.

In hypnotic discourse, similes may appear within the structure of the text and increase its emotionality and expressiveness, and, moreover, an entire hypnotic discourse may be constructed on the basis of a simile. In the following example taken from hypnotic discourse, several similes are used, which serve to enhance the expressiveness of the speaker’s message.

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Внутри тебя сейчас раскрывается пространство, глубокое, как океан, густое, как молоко, смешанное с медом, молчаливое, как утро перед грозой. Из области сердца поднимается пульсирующее тепло, раскатывается, как ритмичные удары большого барабана. Ты лежишь, а внутри все движется, как река после ледохода, как тело после долгого голода, как душа, которая возвращается домой // Inside you now a space is unfolding – deep like the ocean, dense like milk mixed with honey, silent like the morning before a storm. From the region of the heart rises a pulsating warmth, spreading out like the rhythmic beats of a large drum. You are lying still, yet inside everything is moving – like a river after the breaking of ice, like a body after a long hunger, like a soul returning home.

In the given example, the fact that the similes are presented in forms connected with the senses serves to further increase their persuasive force: the sense of sight (глубокое, как океан – deep like the ocean), the sense of taste (густое, как молоко, смешанное с медом – dense like milk mixed with honey), the sense of hearing (молчаливое, как утро перед грозой – silent like the morning before a storm; как ритмичные удары большого барабана – spreading out like the rhythmic beats of a large drum). Such a blending of similes with bodily sensations ensures that the speaker's message is perceived through all the listener's senses; through this emotional impact, direct influence is exerted on the listener's subconscious. The similes function not merely as descriptive devices but as mechanisms of hypnotic influence, serving as means of inducing a trance state. It is precisely similes based on familiar images, sounds, and tastes that reduce cognitive resistance, because the listener's mind forms imagery on the basis of knowledge already available to it. This, in turn, creates a tendency to accept the speaker's ideas as truthful.

In certain cases, hypnotic speech is presented as being constructed entirely on the basis of a single simile. Such discourse may be defined as a text based on a simile.

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Ваши эмоции – это как лампочки и датчики на приборной панели автомобиля. Эти лампочки и датчики установлены в автомобиле с конкретной целью. Они дают вам понять, что нужно сделать, чтобы автомобиль хорошо работал и мог ездить долго и исправно // Your emotions are like the lights and sensors on a car’s dashboard. These lights and sensors are installed in the vehicle for a specific purpose. They let you know what needs to be done for the car to run well and to keep driving for a long time without malfunctioning.

In this case, through the simile, the listener’s body is depicted in proportional correspondence to a car, and an impression is created that the problems in the body are signals similar to car lights and indicators that show a technical malfunction. By means of the simile, simple and easily understandable symbols are formed, and as a result, the listener, visualising clear images, decides to change his or her condition. Throughout the entire discourse, through the body–car simile, the idea is conveyed that it is necessary to identify the existing problems in the patient and eliminate them: Переедание не поможет удовлетворить и успокоить все эти чувства, так же, как и бензин в бензобаке не поможет починить радиатор или восполнить уровень масла // Overeating will not help to satisfy or calm all of these feelings, just as gasoline in a fuel tank will not help to repair a radiator or replenish the oil level.

In hypnotic discourse, the aim is often to encourage the listener to abandon certain habits. The psychotherapeutic intervention speech mentioned above is constructed based on a simile, through which the listener is encouraged to give up the habit of overeating. The speaker does not reveal this intention directly, but, instead, expresses it implicitly through the simile. Just as it is impossible to solve a problem related to a car’s radiator or oil by filling the fuel tank with gasoline, it is conveyed that a person cannot overcome emotional problems by overeating. Such a logical-visual simile forms in the listener’s mind an implicit conclusion that “an internal problem cannot be solved with an external means,” and since

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this idea is presented not as a direct piece of advice but through a simile, it removes mental resistance, prompting the listener to make the decision independently and to change his or her own thinking. As can be seen, the simile functions as an implicit influence, forming an internal decision in the listener through logical-visual proportionality and similarity, without imposing commands or evaluations.

In hypnotic discourse, the psychologically reliable selection of similes is essential because the listener becomes inclined to accept them only if he or she believes in the existence of similarity. As can be seen, through a simile, the speaker, without provoking resistance, uses simple comparison, but with strong emotional emphasis to “persuade” the listener to continue the present emotional experience in the future. Here, a simile functions as a communicative strategy. Repetitive emphasis likewise increases emotional pressure and strengthens the mechanism of suggestive influence.

Thus, in hypnotic discourse, similes are not merely stylistic devices but tools that shape imagery and produce certain emotions in the listener through similarities between objects and phenomena, thereby contributing to altering the listener’s state.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted in this study demonstrates that simile functions as one of the central cognitive and psychopragmatic mechanisms of hypnotic discourse. Unlike its traditional interpretation as a purely stylistic or ornamental device, simile in hypnotic and psychotherapeutic communication serves as an effective means of restructuring perception, activating imagination, and guiding the listener toward a new interpretation of inner experience. By presenting abstract emotions, psychological states, and behavioural problems through familiar sensory images, simile makes complex internal processes more accessible, vivid, and emotionally persuasive.

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The findings show that comparison constitutes a fundamental mechanism of human cognition, as new information is understood through its relation to already existing knowledge, images, and experience. In this regard, simile operates as a linguistic form of comparison that connects the unfamiliar with the familiar and thereby reduces cognitive resistance. In hypnotic discourse, this function becomes especially significant, because the speaker does not impose a direct command or evaluation, but instead creates an implicit associative framework through which the listener independently arrives at a new conclusion.

The examples analysed in Uzbek and Russian hypnotic and psychotherapeutic texts reveal that similes grounded in sensory perception — visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and bodily experience — have a particularly strong suggestive potential. Such similes allow the listener to experience the verbal message not only intellectually, but also emotionally and imaginatively. As a result, figurative comparison becomes capable of influencing subconscious processing, emotional regulation, and decision-making. The comparison of accumulated emotions to erupting magma, or emotional signals to dashboard indicators in a car, demonstrates how simile transforms abstract psychological content into concrete and manageable imagery.

The study also confirms that an entire hypnotic discourse may be structured around a single extended simile. In such cases, simile becomes not merely a local expressive device, but the organizing principle of the discourse. It creates a coherent conceptual model through which the listener interprets personal problems, emotional tension, or behavioural patterns. This type of figurative construction facilitates therapeutic influence because it presents change as a logical and internally motivated process rather than as an externally imposed instruction.

Thus, simile in hypnotic discourse performs several interrelated functions: it intensifies imagery, activates sensory-emotional associations, reduces resistance, directs attention, supports suggestion, and contributes to the transformation of the

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listener's inner state. The results of the study indicate that simile should be regarded as a strategic linguistic tool in hypnotic communication and psychotherapeutic speech. Further research may focus on a broader comparative analysis of similes in different languages, the classification of their cognitive models, and their role in various forms of suggestive, therapeutic, and persuasive discourse.

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ISSN 2760-4926 (Online) Volume 2, Issue 6, June 2026



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