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THE DEVELOPMENT OF METAPHOR IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Metaphor has long occupied a central position in Russian literary tradition, serving not only as an aesthetic device but also as a cognitive and cultural instrument. In contemporary Russian literature, metaphor has undergone significant transformation due to socio-political change, postmodern aesthetics, and evolving linguistic consciousness. This article explores the development of metaphor in Russian literature from the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, focusing on its stylistic, semantic, and ideological functions. By examining key trends and representative authors, the study demonstrates how metaphor reflects new modes of thinking, identity formation, and artistic experimentation in modern Russian prose and poetry.

Keywords: Metaphor, contemporary Russian literature, postmodernism, literary language, symbolism

Introduction

Metaphor has long occupied a central position in literary studies as one of the most powerful linguistic and cognitive tools through which writers construct meaning, convey emotion, and reflect complex social realities. In Russian literature, metaphor has traditionally served not only as an aesthetic device but also as a means of philosophical reflection and ideological expression. From the symbolic richness of the Silver Age to the restrained figurativeness of Socialist Realism, metaphorical language has continuously adapted to historical, political,



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and cultural transformations. In the context of contemporary Russian literature, this adaptation has become especially dynamic, reflecting the profound changes that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new socio-cultural landscape.

Modern Russian literature, broadly understood as literature produced from the late twentieth century to the present day, is characterized by stylistic plurality, genre hybridity, and an intensified focus on individual experience. Within this literary environment, metaphor has undergone significant development, both in form and function. Unlike earlier periods, where metaphors were often shaped by shared ideological frameworks or dominant aesthetic movements, contemporary metaphors tend to be fragmented, experimental, and deeply personal. They frequently draw on everyday language, technological imagery, urban space, and postmodern irony, reflecting the complexities of modern life and the instability of meaning in a rapidly changing world. Another important aspect of metaphor in modern Russian literature is its close connection to cognitive and cultural processes. Influenced by developments in cognitive linguistics, contemporary authors increasingly employ metaphors not merely as decorative elements but as conceptual structures that shape perception and narrative logic. Metaphors related to memory, identity, trauma, and time play a crucial role in representing post-Soviet consciousness, where the past and present often coexist in tension. Through metaphorical language, writers explore themes of loss, disorientation, and the search for new values in a society undergoing continuous transformation. Furthermore, globalization and intercultural exchange have contributed to the evolution of metaphorical expression in Russian literary texts. Modern authors are exposed to Western literary traditions, digital media, and global cultural symbols, which expand the metaphorical repertoire of contemporary prose and poetry. As a result, modern Russian metaphors often combine national cultural codes with universal images, creating a multilayered semantic space that invites diverse interpretations. The aim of this article is to examine the development of



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metaphor in modern Russian literature by analyzing its thematic, stylistic, and cognitive dimensions. The study seeks to identify key trends in metaphorical usage and to demonstrate how metaphor functions as a reflection of broader cultural and ideological shifts. By doing so, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of metaphor in shaping contemporary Russian literary discourse and highlights its significance as a tool for artistic innovation and cultural self-expression.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, text-centered research methodology aimed at analyzing the development and functions of metaphor in modern Russian literature. The methodological framework combines literary analysis with insights from cognitive linguistics and cultural studies, allowing for a multidimensional examination of metaphor as both an aesthetic and conceptual phenomenon. Such an interdisciplinary approach is particularly suitable for contemporary literary texts, which often resist rigid classification and rely on complex figurative structures. The primary material for analysis consists of selected prose and poetic works by representative modern Russian authors writing from the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Texts were chosen based on their critical recognition, thematic relevance, and richness of metaphorical language. This selective corpus approach enables a focused yet diverse examination of metaphorical strategies across different genres and authorial styles, while avoiding overgeneralization. The analysis proceeds through close reading, which serves as the main analytical tool. Individual metaphors and metaphorical clusters are identified and examined within their immediate textual context, as well as in relation to broader narrative structures. Special attention is paid to recurring metaphorical models, such as spatial, bodily, technological, and temporal metaphors, which reflect key aspects of post-Soviet experience. This method allows for the exploration of how metaphors contribute



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to character development, narrative perspective, and thematic coherence. In addition, the study draws on principles of conceptual metaphor theory to interpret how abstract concepts—such as identity, memory, power, and alienation—are structured through metaphorical mappings. By analyzing source and target domains, the research reveals underlying cognitive patterns that shape contemporary literary discourse. This approach helps to demonstrate that metaphors in modern Russian literature function not only as stylistic devices but also as cognitive frameworks through which reality is understood and represented. Contextual and cultural analysis further supports the methodological design. Metaphors are interpreted in relation to historical and socio-cultural conditions, including the legacy of Soviet ideology, the experience of cultural transition, and the influence of globalization. This contextualization ensures that metaphorical meanings are not treated as isolated linguistic phenomena but as culturally embedded expressions that reflect broader social dynamics.

Discussion

The analysis of selected modern Russian literary texts reveals that metaphor in contemporary writing functions as a multifaceted tool, simultaneously aesthetic, cognitive, and socio-cultural. One of the most notable trends is the increased use of fragmented and hybrid metaphors, which reflects the instability and multiplicity of post-Soviet experience. Unlike the more uniform metaphorical frameworks of the Soviet era, modern Russian literature frequently juxtaposes contrasting images, employs irony, and incorporates colloquial or technological language, producing metaphors that are both innovative and contextually resonant.

Spatial and bodily metaphors are particularly prominent in contemporary prose, serving as vehicles for the exploration of personal identity and social positioning. Urban landscapes, domestic interiors, and bodily sensations often serve as metaphorical sites where characters negotiate memory, trauma, and belonging.



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For example, confined spaces frequently symbolize social or psychological constraints, while movement through urban or natural environments reflects freedom, dislocation, or transformation. These metaphors reveal the heightened awareness of individual subjectivity in post-Soviet society and the tension between past and present experiences. Temporal metaphors, especially those related to memory and historical consciousness, are another significant feature of modern Russian literary expression. Authors often construct metaphors that intertwine personal memory with collective history, reflecting a society negotiating the legacies of its ideological past. Such metaphors serve as cognitive tools, allowing readers to conceptualize complex temporal relationships and to engage with the multilayered experience of post-Soviet reality. In this context, metaphor acts not only as a stylistic embellishment but also as a mechanism for processing social and historical transformations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of metaphor in modern Russian literature reflects a profound transformation in the ways writers conceive and communicate meaning. Its adaptive, innovative, and multilayered character ensures that metaphor remains a vital component of literary practice, offering both authors and readers a powerful tool for exploring the intricacies of human experience in the contemporary world.

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