METAPHOR AND METONYMY IN COSTUME DESIGN TERMINOLOGY: A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The language of costume design is an intricate system where creativity, culture, and cognition intersect. This article explores the role of metaphor and metonymy in shaping the terminology of costume design, emphasizing their cognitive, semiotic, and pedagogical significance. Metaphor and metonymy are not mere stylistic ornaments but fundamental linguistic mechanisms that structure conceptualization in design discourse. They enable designers to translate abstract aesthetic visions into material forms and communicate cultural meanings effectively. The study reveals how figurative thinking supports innovation, aids professional communication, and reflects historical and cultural transformations in fashion. Understanding these mechanisms contributes to a deeper comprehension of the interdisciplinary nature of costume design vocabulary and its pedagogical application in multilingual education.

Keywords: Costume design terminology, metaphor, metonymy, cognitive linguistics, fashion communication, figurative language, semiotics, vocabulary teaching.

Introduction

The vocabulary of costume design represents a hybrid communicative system where scientific precision meets artistic imagination. It encompasses both technical terminology – linked to garment construction, tailoring, and materials and expressive terminology – rooted in aesthetic and cultural interpretation [1]. Central to this expressive power are two fundamental mechanisms of human cognition and language: metaphor and metonymy. As argued by Lakoff and Johnson, figurative language is not decorative but conceptual, shaping how

people understand and experience the world [2]. In costume discourse, these mechanisms bridge sensory perception and professional creativity, allowing designers to describe motion, texture, and emotion through linguistic imagination [3]. Understanding how metaphor and metonymy operate in costume terminology is therefore crucial not only for linguistic analysis but also for practical pedagogy in design education, where students learn to connect verbal description with visual realization [4].

Contemporary cognitive semantics views metaphor and metonymy as basic cognitive operations rather than rhetorical devices [5]. Metaphor establishes a mapping between two conceptual domains, for example, comparing a garment's structure to architecture or its movement to water. Metonymy, by contrast, relies on contiguity a part representing the whole or a material standing for a product. In costume design, both processes are intertwined: metaphor activates imagination ("a waterfall of silk"), while metonymy organizes professional shorthand ("lace dominates the season") [6].

These mechanisms enable economy and creativity in professional discourse. They also structure the semiotic field of fashion, where verbal signs reflect material, cultural, and symbolic meanings [7].

Metaphors in costume design often draw from three major conceptual domains:

- **Embodiment metaphors:** Clothing is perceived as a "second skin" or a "sculpted form," reflecting the interdependence between body and garment [8]. Such expressions guide pattern-making and fitting processes by verbalizing tactile and anatomical nuances.

- **Nature metaphors:** Terms like "a river of silk" or "petal-soft texture" convey motion, softness, and visual harmony, transforming sensory impressions into shared professional language [9].

- **Architectural metaphors:** Phrases such as "structured silhouette" or "cantilevered shoulder" connect design with construction and geometry, highlighting the engineering aspect of fashion [10].

These metaphoric frameworks serve creative, communicative, and evaluative functions helping designers articulate concepts, teams collaborate efficiently, and critics or marketers frame public perception [11].

Metonymy simplifies complex relations through associative shortcuts. Three primary types dominate costume discourse:

1. **Producer-for-product (brand metonymy):** Designer names like Dior or Chanel signify entire styles, values, and historical legacies [12].

2. **Material-for-object:** Statements such as "denim returns this season" use fabric names to stand for fashion trends [13].

3. **Part-for-whole (synecdoche):** References like "the hemline" or "the shoulder" encapsulate full silhouettes or seasonal identities [14].

Such metonymies are effective because they rely on shared cultural conventions and industry familiarity. As in other professional discourses, these shortcuts reflect both collective expertise and social symbolism [15].

In practice, metaphor and metonymy often interact. For example, "a metallic armor dress" fuses metaphor (armor → protection, power) and metonymy (metallic → fabric finish), evoking function and emotion simultaneously. Over time, terms evolve: "denim" once referred to a material but now metaphorically represents youth or rebellion. Such shifts illustrate semantic dynamism within fashion lexicon, revealing how cultural meanings transform along with material practices.

From a semiotic standpoint, costume terminology mediates between materiality and meaning. Metaphoric expressions guide creativity; metonymic expressions ensure precision. Pragmatically, designers translate metaphoric briefs like "make it breathe" into material specifications such as "use chiffon and bias cut".

Pedagogically, explicit awareness of metaphor and metonymy enhances terminological competence. Students should not only memorize terms but learn to interpret figurative vocabulary in real contexts – runway reviews, design critiques, and press releases. Integrating cognitive linguistics into design curricula can thus strengthen interdisciplinary education.

Because figurative language draws on cultural models, it may also reflect stereotypes or inequalities. For instance, metaphors linking femininity with fragility or exoticizing non-Western clothing deserve critical reflection. As fashion becomes increasingly globalized, awareness of cultural context in figurative naming supports ethical communication and cross-cultural sensitivity in design terminology.

Metaphor and metonymy form the cognitive and communicative core of costume design terminology. They shape the way designers conceptualize forms, technicians realize them, critics evaluate them, and audiences interpret them. Metaphor invites creative transformation by mapping new meanings across

sensory and conceptual domains. Metonymy provides cognitive economy, enabling concise, shared reference within professional communities. Together, they establish a grammar of visual, material, and social meaning within fashion discourse. For educators and linguists, studying these mechanisms means transforming vocabulary instruction into a pathway toward conceptual and cultural literacy in design studies.

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