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Pierre Mendell's Opera Poster Designs from Simile to Metaphor

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Abstract

Metaphor, which has got a substitute role for words such as symbol, allegory, simile, borrowing or similitude, has been used in many areas from past to present. Metaphor provides forming a connection between two things which have got no relation by building a mental borrowing. Examples of metaphor are seen on the cave wall paintings' depictions in history. Plato expressed metaphorical meaning by drawing attention to the other reality beyond the obvious. Therefore, depicting and indicating the obvious to something else is also associated with Plato's Theory of Mimesis. In this regard, reflection has got an influential place in metaphorical expression. Metaphors based on resemblance provides expressing the newly learnt information via old knowledge. Metaphor, as being an essential constituent of communication, is also widely used in the visual communication area. Preferring indirect speech style in visual communication has provided them collaborating with metaphorical understanding. Thus, the usage of metaphor has got a place in visual communication tools as well as causing statements to be more influential and catchy. Within this context, German-born graphic designer Pierre Mendell's designer identity, design understanding and the metaphors represented by the images in his opera posters have been analysed in this research. Metaphors in posters have been interpreted in accordance with the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson. It has been seen that the designer presents the message he wants to convey to the audience with much richer content thanks to the metaphors he used in the posters.

Keywords: Metaphor, Poster, Pierre Mendell, Visual Communication Design.

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Introduction

Metaphor, derived from the Greek word *metapherein* (*meta*: beyond, above, *pherein*: transfer), is used as transferring a phenomenon or concept above itself (Corbett & Connors, 1999: 122). Metaphor is expressing the unknown by comparing the known tool's features through resemblance. In addition to this, it is also accepted as a visual tool since it refers to a concrete concept which consists of words and visuals (Parsa & Parsa, 2002: 67, Berkli & Gultepe, 2016: 45). The thing, which is to be explained on the basis of metaphor, is explained based upon something else. There are verbal, written and visual metaphors. As in terms of conceptional, there are plenty of metaphor types. The most used ones are (Kucukerdogan, 2009: 144-145):

Closed metaphor: is a borrowing type that the resembling one is evoked instead of being indicated.

Combined metaphor: is a metaphor that two or more different resembled ones are together and sometimes mixed in.

Dead metaphor: is a metaphor that is used so frequently that it becomes ordinary and the difference is not noticed any longer.

Visual metaphor: is a metaphor that has got a rich visuality.

It is not correct to accept the metaphor concept as entirely linguistic. Metaphor usage takes part in visual communication designs as well as in many areas. It is possible to see metaphors often in poster designs. On behalf of increasing memorability in poster designs; drawing attention, increasing remembering levels and convincing are aimed by using metaphors.

Metaphor Concept from Past to Present and its Relation with Simile

Linguists, semioticians, philosophers and rhetoricians from Aristotle to Barthes have been interested in metaphor (Bati, 2007: 330). Plato explains the relationship between ideas and the material world with the Allegory of the Cave (Keklik, 18). Aristotle describes the metaphor concept as naming something after something else. According to Aristotle, metaphor is a word problem (Aristotle, 2003: 34). Therefore, the metaphor concept had been evaluated as a linguistic concept until 1970. By the end of 1970, linguists such as George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Michael Reddy has argued that metaphor is related to thoughts and movements (Bati, 2012: 3,5). Reddy emphasises that metaphors are tools for explaining the meaning of life. Accordingly; it is thought that metaphor underlies the concepts that describe our emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that concepts, which manage our thoughts, are not only the issue of mind but also manage our daily life even in the most ordinary details. According to this, they associate metaphor with resemblance by evaluating it as a concept. Based on this point of view, concepts are either abstract or perceived by experiences (emotions, thoughts etc.) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 4,116). In this sense, metaphor helps to conceptualise our emotions in a clearer way.

Although metaphors differ in structural formation, they preserve their functional structure. For this reason, metaphor types are sometimes used together and sometimes used separately. According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory improved by Lakoff and Johnson, visual metaphors are examined regarding their types (Ay, 2020: 17). In terms of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor is divided into three titles: ontological metaphor, orientational metaphor and conceptual metaphor (Gunes & Firat, 2016: 117, 118). Metaphor not only takes place in language but also takes place in conceptual structure which we use for thinking and action.

Metaphor, which is also stated as borrowing or simile in Arabic and Turkish, has gained a seat in representations of indicators in the historical process as a communication tool within the structure of the language. The relationship between indicators and representations has eased the usage of metaphors. Recognition of indicators as a scientific field has been originated with Roland Barthes.



According to the traditional point of view, the conceptual metaphor approach is evaluated as the most important piece of the conceptual system even though metaphor uses verbal statements that support indirect speech (Duyuler, 2019: 5).

Visual metaphors are frequently used in visual communication areas since they are more indirect and richer in terms of content. Visual metaphors cause individuals to extend the perception of incidents while causing them to make different sense of things (Dundar, 2020: 51). Thus, it is indicated that visual metaphors are more persuasive than verbal metaphors.

According to Thomson, metaphors are establishing a connection between two different images at the hands of the designer and presenting to the audience. These connections, on the other hand, are perceived regarding the intuitions and the knowledge of the audience. Consequently; the knowledge, good tastes and cultural values of the audience should be taken into consideration while using metaphor in visual communication design (Ay, 2020:15). Perceiving and exploring references in the design by the audience is substantial in this sense.

Metaphors used in visual communication design provides drawing the attention of the audience to think about and interpret the message which is to be conveyed (Chaves, 2013: 103). The audience interprets the metaphor according to their cultural values, the environment they live in and their gender. Metaphors stand out as a powerful problem-solving communication language and messages secretly loaded into the image. Although the simile and metaphor terms seem as they state the same situations, they differ in terms of the meaning they carry. "Simile" is an expressing style that expresses a situation, phenomenon or concept by increasing the effectiveness of the word with something else's name or feature instead of its own name. Simile is a narrative form whereas metaphor is a tool used in this narrative (Demir & Karakas Yildirim, 2019:1088).

Cultural Posters in Graphic Design

Graphic design presents impressive visuals by taking concepts, thoughts and images to undergo different processes. The designer, on the other hand, organises different factors in a way for content to be received and understood by the target audience for the sake of easing the communication process (Ambrose & Harris, 2012:10).

Graphic design provides a thought to be catchy by finding the visuals that reflect the joke or humour while searching for ways of conveying it to the target audience. Humour is generally a visual description of the language in graphic design (Ambrose & Harris, 2012:86). One of the best methods of reflecting humour in design is the posters. At the same time, slogans and metaphors are basic foundations in poster design and form the main factors of communication. Every design element provides the target audience to interpret the information by communicating with them. One of the significant points here is how the metaphors used in posters are presented. Metaphors are among the powerful communication tools since they express much more than their contained meaning.

Poster, which is one of the graphic design elements, is a communication tool used for serving a purpose and advising a product or service (Becer, 2015:204). Poster design is expected to make sense in a short span of time. We could encounter posters in many areas while walking on a street or driving (Turgut, 2013:19). Poster design is used for announcing social, political and cultural events as well as giving information to the audience within production and consumption relation. A poster has got a constant reminder feature (Tepecik, 2002:74). It is possible to collect posters under three titles. These are advertisement posters, cultural posters and social posters. Cultural posters presented within the subject of this research are poster types prepared for announcing events in cultural areas such as festivals, seminars, symposiums, balls, concerts, cinema, theatre, exhibition and sports (Becer, 2015:202). The purpose of this poster type is to invite people to the event apart from informing the audience about the event.

Pierre Mendell and His Metaphors in Poster Designs

German designer was born in 1929 and immigrated to France in 1934, then moved to America after France was taken back by the Allies in 1945. Even though he acquired citizenship, he did not stay in the USA



for a long time, afterwards, he returned to his homeland then became a German interpreter in the army. After he left the army, he worked in France between the years of 1953-1958 (Erguven, 2008:69, URL6). Mendell generally designed opera and concert posters. During his education years between 1958 and 1960 in Basel Design school, his graphic design teacher was Armin Hofmann. Designer Basell established a commercial studio with Klaus Oberer, who inspired Basell in terms of design language and was one of the most significant designers (Gayret, 2016: 795). This workplace has been in business as "Pierre Mendell Design Studio" since 2000 (Erguven, 2008:69).

The studio has continued to design printed advertising materials for cultural institutions all over Germany. Impressive colour usage and reductive compositions of Mendell made him gain reputation and recognition. Mendell worked as a designer in cultural institutions such as "Die Neue Sammlung" beginning from 1980 and "Bayerische Staatsoper" beginning from 1990. His designs for these two institutions has gone down in history as the best poster design examples and these designs are still being used in both institutions' public appearance (URL6, Erguven, 2008:69).



Figure 1. Die Neue Sammlung, The New Collection of Book Design exhibition, Switzerland, 1994 (URL6).



Figure 2. Die Neue Sammlung, Kirche Kunst, (URL6).

He transforms the posters that he designed from complex contexts to influential and characteristic elements by expressing them in a comprehensible way with the help of attractive colours and style factors. Meaning and message connection can be clearly seen in his posters, yet the message he wants to convey requires deep reading. Vividness, poem and humour are the up-front and essential factors in the posters he designed (Erguven, 2008:69, Gayret, 2016: 795,796). Generally, metaphors that find an expression with simple and powerful representation in his posters are Mendell's main feature of design language. The typography that he uses in his posters serving as a signature is used by everyone (URL5). Mendell created a signature for himself by typographic editing on the right side of the poster he designed for Bavarian State Opera. He used Bodoni font for the name of the Opera, whereas he preferred Univers font for all other additional information.

Munich Bavarian State Opera, which is one of the best operas in the world, is famous for its opera posters in the graphic design field. Peter Johnson made a deal with Pierre Mendell for opera posters and brochure designs in 1993. Images that Mendell used in his posters give brief and to the point information about concerts and operas. He associates semantic level images with similes. These based-on simile images that control posters deepen the meaning. He creates a simile pattern that is open-ended and endlessly evokes by placing surprising meanings into simple symbols (Erguven, 2008:69).

Posters Mendell designed for Bavarian State Opera has taken part in billboards for more than 12 years (URL1). He used a unique expression language in the posters thanks to the metaphors he created. The metaphors, which remain at the forefront of creating the final meaning, not only invite the opera audience to watch the show but also to think and imagine (Erguven, 2008:73).



Fundamental structure in his designs is based on likening, comparing or helping to clarify something to another. This visual structure is seen so dominant in his posters that typographic factors appear as excesses. His works in the visual communication field managed to turn upside-down the boundaries between design and art. Mendell implements identifications based on metaphors such as church-cross, Egypt-pyramid, violence-blood (Ergüven, 2008:69). Fictionalising, conveying and resolving the meaning of the messages in the posters support the indirect speech. Mendell transformed metaphors into fiction factors and performed the meaning formation process. Along with creating a flawless identity for Munich Opera, he provided the opera building to form a unique visual language.



Figure 3. Pierre Mendell, "La Traviata", (URL4).

It is required to transfer conceptual metaphor from source field to target field and produce a new concept or narrative to form a conceptual metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson brought forward in Conceptual Metaphor Theory. La Traviata by Giuseppe Verdi, which is in Figure 3, is an adapted work of art for opera based upon this information. This three-act short story was inspired by Alexandre Dumas's novel The Lady of the Camelias published in 1848. "La Traviata" means the fallen woman (the one who goes astray). It narrates a tragic love story between Alfredo and Violetta. In the first act, Violetta gives the camellia in her neck to Alfredo and wants him to come to her when the flower withers. After a while, they start to live together out of town. However, Violetta, who is not accepted and seen as a woman of easy virtue by Alfredo's father, is obliged to break up with Alfredo. In the final act, Violetta goes down with tuberculosis illness, and Alfredo's father feels sorry for what he has done. Violetta dies at the end of the act.

In this context, white camellia framed with grey colour and seen with three hearts on a silent grey rectangle with pink pastel dots in the middle reflects La Traviata's subject in the poster (URL 7). Mendell associated the sorrow of the love story with the metaphor of the heart, which is a black leaf that falls off the flower. Out of the fallen leaves, the black heart represents Alfredo's father, the grey heart represents Alfredo and the light pink heart represents Violetta.



Figure 4. Pierre Mendell, "Othello", Shakespeare, 1999 (URL3).

Othello by Shakespeare is a four-act play. Opera narrates the story about Othello, who was inducted as a governor to Cyprus, his wife Desdemona, his assistant Iago and naval force commander Cassio. Iago thinks that he deserves Cassio's military rank. Hereupon, Iago lays a plot and talks to Desdemona about the degradation of Cassio and wants Desdemona to convey this issue to her husband Othello since Iago thinks Desdemona can influence Othello for him to take back the military rank. The opera is about Othello being manipulated by Iago as if there was a relationship between Cassio and Desdemona and then causing Othello to choke his wife to death.

In the poster that Pierre Mendell designed for the opera, laced gloved white hand and black hand are seen one on the top of the other. Black and white hands emphasise Desdemona's murder after Othello's jealousy (URL 7). Black hand's being on the top makes people think this hand has got the superiority. It is seen that the white hand represents the woman in the sense that lace pattern and the colour. Also, white is the symbol of undefiled and purity. Although, black symbolises evil, death and sorrow while representing man in terms of gender.

Additionally, black is expressed as hell's and satan's colour in religious books. It contains hiding, covering and disguising in its nature. Black is as good as the end, it gives night and the endless universe (Ucar, 2014: 50). The designer assigned the red background of the poster a meaning based on simile. Herein, red represents blood and makes a reference to Othello committing the murder.



Figure 5. Pierre Mendell, "The Twelfth Night", Shakespeare, 1998.

"The Twelfth Night" (Figure 5) by William Shakespeare is about Viola and Sebastian twins who are separated from each other in a shipwreck. Cloud metaphors, which are the same but looking at different directions, in the poster present the subject. Processing eye symbols into the clouds make the audience think while personating the clouds metaphorically. Another point that grabs attention is that the directions of the eyes are different. In this context, it is emphasised that twins make different decisions in life and are in separate places.

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Figure 6. Pierre Mendell, "The Rape of Lucretia", 2004.

"The Rape of Lucretia", which is a two-act play, takes place in an armed camp outside of Rome. Junius provokes the son of the king Tarquinius to test Lucretia's, who is the wife of Collatinus, chastity. Tarquinius breaks into Lucretia's room while she is asleep and rapes her. Lucretia stabs herself to death even though Collatinus thinks that it is not his wife's fault.

Pierre Mendell used a simple metaphor in the poster he designed for the opera "The Rape of Lucretia". Mendell put a torn image in the shape of a triangle to resemble a woman's vulva, which was painted red and created a metaphor in this way. In this context, the torn paper refers to rape, while the red colour supports this point of view.

Conclusion

We come across metaphors in our daily lives and we live with them. Metaphors appear in our sentences as we communicate, in advertising posters we see while walking on the road and in many places. Usage of metaphor is one of the visual communication methods that designers frequently apply. In terms of being influential and attention-grabbing particularly in poster designs, metaphor is one of the most preferred expression styles among visual communication design tools. While the audience interprets the metaphor, they actively participate in the communication process and mentally make an effort in the interpretation process. The audience is not only the receiver of the message but also becomes a participant in the processes of comprehending the metaphors in the poster and creating meaning.

It has been seen that the metaphors, which have been analysed within the frame of this study, strengthen the meaning in posters and provide establishing a bond with the audience. Metaphors used in posters render narration more attractive and aesthetic while getting rid of ordinariness. The objective of convincing the audience and conveying the necessary message has been achieved thanks to meaning transfer via metaphors. It is apparent that a deep intellectual process underlies the metaphors Pierre Mendel used in opera posters. As a result of this intellectual process, metaphoric meaning is interpreted by the audience while



making them develop their perspective to be broader. In this sense, metaphors used in posters have got a significant position for leading the audience to new information.

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