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Indo-European Poetics meets Cognitive Linguistics: an integrated approach to the comparative reconstruction of metaphoric and metonymic expressions

The development of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and Cognitive Linguistics in general (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004), as well as their application to Historical Linguistics (cf. Sweetser 1990:23-48; Winters, Tissari and Allan 2011), have greatly improved our understanding of how figurative expressions like metaphors and metonymies work. Even though cognitive-linguistic notions have been successfully employed in the study of figurative language within single ancient IE traditions (e.g., Latin: Short 2008; 2013; Fedriani 2016; Kölligan 2020; Ancient Greek: Pagán Cánovas 2011; Forte 2019; Zanker 2019; Vedic Sanskrit: Jurewicz 2010), correspondences between traditional formulaic phrases attested in several Indo-European traditions have been traditionally investigated exclusively through the lens of Historical Linguistics and Comparative Indo-European Poetics (on which see, e.g., Watkins 1995 and García Ramón 2021).

Aim of the presentation is to argue that, as proposed in Ginevra (2019, 2021a and 2021b), uniting Comparative Indo-European Poetics and Cognitive Linguistics might not only be possible, but also of great use to both disciplines. To this end, after reconstructing – on the basis of evidence from several IE languages – an inherited system of figurative expressions involving the conceptualization of LIFE and DEATH, this reconstructed system will be interpreted as a reflex of two basic metaphoric and metonymic processes that have long been discussed within Cognitive Linguistics:

- on the one hand, these IE traditional expressions will be shown to instantiate Lakoff's (1993:222–223) “Event Structure Conceptual Metaphor”, according to which STATES are mapped onto LOCATIONS, CHANGES onto MOVEMENTS, and CAUSES onto FORCES;
- on the other hand, this reconstructed system will be argued to reflect a so-called “complex event Idealized Cognitive Model” (Kövecses and Radden 1998:51) of the state TO BE ALIVE, i.e., as an event involving several distinct subevents that are habitually more or less co-present in the life of a human being.

The identification of these two (likely universal) processes of human cognition as the basic principles underlying this formulaic system of Indo-European heritage will be argued to be of fundamental importance for the investigation of further issues of Indo European etymology and historical semantics, especially if combined with other well established notions of Cognitive Linguistics (e.g., image schemata).

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