

# **LANGUAGE MASK AND THE AXIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF DIFFICULT CONCEPTS: A THEOETICAL CONTRIBUTION SUPPORTED BY EMPIRICAL STUDY**

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Taboo, abstract and complex concepts, such as death, are difficult to talk about, and typically employ the use of figurative language, such as metaphors, metonymies and other cognitive pragmatic tools. The presentation introduces the concept of a language mask as a general device which profiles the expressed concept and modifies its conceptualisation and perception – by selecting aspects to be shown and those to be hidden. The axiological aspect, one of the basic ones in categorisation, is especially prone to this manipulation. The paper analyses how the concept of DEATH/ŚMIERĆ is expressed, masked and valued, and supports the discussion with results of an empirical cross-cultural study. The research on the axiological charge of selected language masks for DEATH/ŚMIERĆ was carried out on Polish and English native speakers (457 survey participants).

The study aimed to answer the following questions: Is it possible for “the same” concept to be valued in various ways (more positively or more negatively), depending on the way it is expressed? What makes some expressions of “the same” concept valued differently? How does humour modify the axiological load of figurative expressions – e.g. does humor ‘tame’ death? Are some expressions for death less negatively perceived than others? Are the above phenomena similar cross-culturally, e.g. among Polish and English respondents (e.g. do Poles perceive spiritual conceptualisations as more positively charged)? How may reversing the perspective within the same basic conceptual metaphor change the axiological load? And, more generally, how can we modulate the valuing of a concept by using different metaphors, metonymies and other figurative expressions?

The concept of a language mask is a contribution to linguistics as a tool of potential application in analyses within cognitive pragmatics and semantics, semiotics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, political linguistics, etc. A functional typology of language masks is proposed. The axiological aspect of figurative language and thought is a very powerful tool, often used in manipulation.

## References

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