Phraseology and Figurative Language in Architectural Essays

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Abstract: Phraseology is concerned with linguistic expressions that usually co-occur together and that tend to convey unitary meaning. Phraseological units include collocates or combinations of words that typically configure the language of specific professional domains. Figurative language is a recurrent feature of architectural communication, as illustrated by the use of metaphor (referring to an element in terms of another: A is B): "The building is an oasis", "The studio is a beehive"; metonymy (part standing for whole or vice versa, or cause for effect): "The building speaks in a dialogue between the exterior and the interior"; or simile (expressing explicit comparison through "as"/ "like" particles): "The escalator twists like a snake". This paper aims to study the interplay of figurative language and phraseology in academic texts by analyzing a linguistic corpus of essays written by architecture students studying English. The use of metaphor was identified following the Pragglejaz Group's MIP method (2007). The results of this work can shed light on the phraseology of the figurative language of architectural written communication and provide practical insights into improving architecture students' writing skills.
Keywords: Phraseology. Architecture. Phraseological Unit. Discourse analysis. English.

Título: «La fraseología y el lenguaje figurado de los ensayos de Arquitectura».
Resumen: La fraseología estudia combinaciones de palabras que suelen expresar un significado unitario. Las unidades fraseológicas comprenden colocaciones léxicas propias del lenguaje de ámbitos profesionales específicos. En la comunicación arquitectónica, el lenguaje figurado constituye un rasgo característico manifestado en el uso de la metáfora (comparación directa de dos cosas distintas: A es B): «El edificio es un oasis», «El estudio es una colmena»; la metonimia (parte por el todo, todo por la parte o causa por efecto): «El edificio presenta un diálogo entre el interior y el exterior»; o el símil (comparación por medio del nexo «como»): «La escalera mecánica se arquea como una serpiente». Este artículo tiene como objetivo estudiar la interrelación entre lenguaje figurado y fraseología en textos académicos, concretamente en un corpus lingüístico de ensayos escritos por estudiantes de inglés de Arquitectura. Para identificar la metáfora se aplicó el método MIP del Grupo Pragglejaz (2007). Los resultados obtenidos intentan esclarecer la fraseología y el lenguaje figurado de la comunicación escrita de la arquitectura, proporcionando importantes claves que permitan mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes de dicha disciplina.
Palabras clave: Fraseología. Arquitectura. Unidad fraseológica. Análisis del discurso. Inglés.

Titre : « Phraséologie et langage figuré dans les essais d'architecture ».
Résumé : La phraséologie s'intéresse aux expressions linguistiques qui coexistent habituellement et ont tendance à véhiculer un sens unitaire. Les unités phraséologiques englobent des collocations ou des combinaisons de mots qui caractérisent typiquement le langage de domaines professionnels spécifiques. Le langage figuré est une caractéristique récurrente de la communication architecturale, comme l'illustre l'usage de la métaphore (désigner un élément en fonction d'un autre : A est B) : « Le bâtiment est une oasis », « L'agence est une ruche » ; de la métonymie (la partie pour le tout, ou inversement, ou la cause pour l'effet) : « Le bâtiment s'exprime à travers un dialogue entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur » ; ou de la

comparaison (exprimée explicitement à travers les termes « comme » ou « tel que ») : « L'escalier mécanique ondule comme un serpent ». Cet article vise à étudier l'interaction du langage figuré et de la phraséologie dans les textes académiques, en analysant un corpus linguistique composé de rédactions d'étudiants en architecture apprenant l'anglais. L'identification des métaphores a été réalisée selon la méthode MIP du Pragglejaz Group (2007). Les résultats de cette étude permettent d'éclairer la phraséologie de la communication écrite en architecture et d'aboutir à des conclusions concrètes, offrant ainsi des pistes pratiques pour améliorer les compétences rédactionnelles des étudiants en architecture.
Mots-clés : Phraséologie. Architecture. Unité phraséologique. Analyse du discours. Anglais.

INTRODUCTION

Former studies on architectural communication have dealt with figurative meaning by reflecting on its role in specific written genres (Caballero, 2003; Caballero, 2006; Kloppmann-Lambert, 2018), in oral and multimodal discourse (Úbeda, 2003; Casakin, 2017), or in architectural design language (Coyne *et al.*, 1994). However, to our knowledge, little research has addressed the combined use of phraseology and figurative language in academic writing activities. Writing skills play an essential role in architectural education and constitute an essential part of students' academic training. The genre of architectural academic essays represents an effective way for students to foster their writing and to engage with the conventions of their professional community. According to Swales *et al.* (2001: 451), students need to be familiar with metaphorical language to successfully describe their designs. In fact, writing practice facilitates the task of putting into words the visual images students have of their designs in a clear and comprehensible way. Sevilla and Sevilla (2003) affirm that knowledge of specific figures of speech, lexical expressions and rhetorical conventions are essential to master the language of specialized communities. In architecture, buildings are usually conceived as animate beings (people) or as inanimate entities (books, texts) and figurative language becomes the best vehicle to convey such resemblance (Unwin, 2019; Roldán-Riejos, 2024).

This paper carries out a corpus analysis of 135 academic essays written by 3rd year architecture students learning professional and academic communication in English who have a high-intermediate or advanced level of English language. The main aim of the study is to identify and describe the combination of figurative language and phraseology in students' writing. Students were asked to submit anonymous essays of 300 words referred on architectural subjects of their choice, these topics could deal with their ideal studios, their architectural projects, building styles or discuss works of their favorite architects.

The first part of this work addresses the focus of the study, the method followed and the formulation of research questions. A study of two salient keywords in the corpus: "space" and "project" follows by delving into the identification of figurative language and its major structural patterns. The main results are next analyzed and discussed. Because of its relevance, the specific phraseology of similes preceded by the particles AS/LIKE is also explored by examining the imagery of source domains and of the adjoining grammatical structures. The study finishes with some concluding remarks and recommendations.

1. FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

The research questions addressed in this study are:

- What types of figurative language are prevalent in the salient keywords SPACE and PROJECT in the analyzed corpus? How are they categorized? These questions aim to identify the figurative content developed by these words and to explore their use.
- What type of phraseology appears in combination with the identified figurative language? This question aims to address both lexical (collocates, specific expressions) and grammatical aspects (clauses, noun phrases or verb types).
- Is the presence of similes relevant? How are they configured? These questions are concerned with the imagery of similes and their structural configuration.

The corpus analysed consists of 38,323 words collected from 135 essays written by third-year architecture students analysed by ANTCONC and Sketch Engine, two software tools specifically designed for text analysis. The first step in the corpus analysis was to filter higher-frequency content words (nouns, adjectives or verbs) from function words (prepositions or conjunctions) in order to identify meaningful keywords. Keywords are words that occur more frequently in a corpus than they do in general language. To determine the main specific keywords of the analysed (focus) corpus, we compared it with the British Academic Written English corpus (BAWE) as a reference. The BAWE corpus contains 6.9 million words of academic works from different disciplines written at universities in the UK.

The exploration of keywords in our focus corpus entailed two phases:

a. The comparison with the BAWE reference corpus. This yielded a total value of 4.25, a score which indicates a valid variation between both corpora.
b. A contextual examination of potential keywords through the concordance tool. This allowed us to study the lexical and grammatical combinations in which they are inserted.

The role that similes played in the figurative language found in the analysed essays required further exploration. Similes represent a direct mode to convey analogy in figurative language by means of the particles AS/LIKE. The use of similes in architectural discourse entails the possibility to translate visual images into words when describing built structures as Caballero (2003, 2006) points out. Accordingly, a perusal of the phraseological configuration of similes was deemed pertinent to the study.

1.1. Corpus Analysis of "Space/s" and "Project/s"

As commonly occurs in corpus analysis, the most common single words elicited are function words (articles, prepositions and auxiliary verbs). Because of their low semantic value, this type of words was disregarded. Instead, the focus was on content words (nouns, verbs and adjectives). PROJECT/S and SPACE/S were the most salient architectural nouns found in the corpus, having 323 and 307 occurrences respectively.

2. RESULTS FOR "SPACE(S)"

The most frequent keyword was: SPACE/S, with 323 specific occurrences. This section deals with an analysis of SPACE, its figurative language use and its phraseological structure. The Pragglejaz group's Method Identification Procedure (MIP) was applied to study the presence of metaphor in SPACE/S. Metaphor is a cognitive tool in which an object from one domain (usually abstract) is described in terms of another (usually concrete). Following MIP, the basic meaning of SPACE was first checked with COBUILD, a dictionary that gives priority to the use of words in context. The definition of SPACE in COBUILD refers to was examined "an empty or available area (small or large), or the vast region beyond Earth's atmosphere

containing stars and planets". The following step, according to the Pragglejaz group's method, is to analyze the word in context to compare its literal with its contextual meaning. The phraseology where SPACE occurred was examined using of the ANTCONC concordance, n-grams and collocate tools and reviewed in depth to derive metaphorical projections or mappings between the source and target domains (A is B). Phraseological samples of up to 10 word long phrases were extracted and categorized into three major semantic groups, following Deignan (2016). They are specified below with various examples extracted from the corpus:

I. SPACE IS A HUB: (architectural space relates elements that evoke a site full of activity, creativity or innovation):

- *A space where ideas become real*
- *He is a philosopher of space*
- *A powerful central space where all life comes together.*
- *The importance of public space in shaping successful urban environments*

II. SPACE IS AN ARTIFACT: (space evokes a concrete object which architects can easily handle and utilize):

- *The terraces that shape the public space are heterogeneous*
- *The middle shell is an intermediate space*
- *The spaces are not divided by walls*
- *Architecture has the power to transform not only spaces*

III. SPACE IS A LIVING BEING: (qualities pertaining to a living/human being are projected onto space)

- *Natural light makes the space feel more alive*
- *Welcome to our hopeful space*
- *A dialogue between structure and urban space*

The latter group portrays an anthropocentric view of "space" which is endowed with human qualities.

2.1. Cases where metonymy operates

Metaphor frequently operates together with metonymy. Metonymy refers to a semantic relationship of contiguity: cause/effect, part/whole or process/result within the same domain. For instance, in "the space encourages clarity" "the space" refers to a specific dwelling or room, by taking the part for the whole. Conversely, in "the spaces are not divided by walls" a cause/result relationship (walls for rooms) can be inferred. The elements part/whole and cause/effect relations can actually interact.

2.2. Use of figurative language and its phraseology

An analysis was conducted to determine whether students used figurative language more frequently in a particular section or rhetorical move of their essays (Swales, 1990): Title (T), Introduction (I), Development (D) or Conclusions (C). When "space" is used in the title (T), architectural activity adopts personified attributes and compare "space" to a magic or interactive scenario:

- *A space where ideas become real* (T)
- *A dialogue between structure and urban space* (T)

In the Introduction (I) "spaces" become flexible objects that can change and expand:

- *Architecture has the power to transform not only spaces* (I).
- *Adaptable spaces that respond to the needs of each user* (I)

In the Development (D) section, "spaces" play an influential part in molding towns and in coining perceptions:

- *The villa is a labyrinth of interconnected spaces* (D)
- *A comfortable and friendly space that invites you to wake up* (D)
- *A powerful central space where all life comes together.* (D)

In Conclusions (C), "space" becomes a sort of manager or a concept on which architects can theorize:

- *The importance of public space in shaping successful urban environments* (C).
- *He is a philosopher of space* (C).

2.3. Discussion

Figurative language appears with a higher frequency in the Development section (D) of essays with the function to explain personal views or to give pros and cons. The use of metaphor in the title, introduction and conclusion is also significant because its use augments the textual cohesion of these sections with the rest of the essay.

Another relevant feature found in the phraseological structure of these metaphors is the extensive use of qualifiers, i.e. the combination of adjective + noun. The function of these adjectives: *real, powerful, successful, heterogeneous, intermediate, comfortable, alive,* and *adaptable* is not only descriptive but also emphatic. Although their position can vary, adjectives preceding the noun (attributive position) appear more frequently. This set of words: "public/urban space", "interconnected spaces", "powerful central space" marks an established degree of phraseological fixedness in architectural discourse.

3. RESULTS FOR "PROJECT(S)"

The second salient keyword identified in the corpus with 307 occurrences is PROJECT/S. The basic meaning of PROJECT according to the COBUILD Dictionary is: "a task requiring significant time, effort, and planning; a planned undertaking, scheme, or specific assignment".
To examine the metaphorical value (A is B) of this term, the basic meaning was first checked and contrasted with contextual occurrences in the corpus with the help of ANTCONC tools. To analyze the phraseology, segments of 10-12 words were extracted and then arranged into three semantic groups:

I. A PROJECT IS A TEXT (it characterizes architectural projects as texts or books):
   - *A project has a unique essence and character*
   - *Materiality also plays an important role in the project*
   - *The project re-imagines the traditional library*
   - *This project is the ultimate expression of architecture that delivers a message*

II. A PROJECT IS A LIVING/HUMAN BEING (it invokes qualities associated with living/human beings):
   - *Rather than opposing nature, the project works with it*

- *A project that is sensitive and respectful with its surroundings*
- *The project was born from the ground*

III. A PROJECT IS A NARRATOR (it evokes features typical of a narrator, like creating dialogues):
- *The project creates a dialogue between past and present*
- *The project responds directly to the extreme conditions of the alpine site*
- *The project needs to dialogue with two amazing museums and the sea*

3.1. Discussion

The main *phraseological* structure found for PROJECT responds to this pattern: *Subject + Verb + Adjectives* (the latter consisting of qualifiers inserted either in single or compound clauses).

The structure of the sentences sometimes includes the use of relative phrases and contrastive particles (e.g. "rather than"….) but the main sort of lexical collocates appear in qualifying combinations. These qualifiers have an attributive position labeling and preceding the noun:

"*important project*", "*specific project*"
"*creative project*", "*quiet project*"

If the qualifying element occurs after the noun, personification is found at the end of the clause:
- The project creates *a dialogue between past and present*
- The project *responds directly to the extreme conditions of the alpine site*
- The project *needs to dialogue with two amazing museums and the sea*
- Projects *would emphasize the sensory engagement*
- A project *has a unique essence and character*

Apart from metaphor use discussed above, another figurative feature found in the essays is amplification, a figure of speech that works by magnifying the expressed meaning. For example, in "This project is the *ultimate* expression of architecture that delivers a message*"* the use of "ultimate" is marking the unique character of a project. In similar cases, the choice of adjectives: "*amazing*", "*unique*", "*powerful*" and verbs "*emphasize*" helps to draw attention to a particular idea or topic.

4. ANALYSIS OF "AS/LIKE" SIMILES

A simile can be defined as a type of explicit metaphor (Caballero, 2006; Romano, 2017; Israel *et al.*, 2004). Even though both simile and metaphor involve some sort of comparison, in metaphor the basis of comparison does not need to be overtly expressed. Conversely, in similes the terms of comparison are made explicit by the particles AS/LIKE. Israel et al. (2004) argue that there could also be some specific comparative constructions apart from these particles. Similes are different from metaphors because although the formula of having a source and a target domain is shared in both, concrete images are better expressed through similes rather than with metaphor.

In the analysis, the first step consisted of identifying which types of images (concrete or abstract) were more salient in the source and target domains and the roles they performed. The second step was to determine how students perceived and used similes.

4.1. "As" Similes: Results and Discussion

Within the corpus, the particle "as" has 303 occurrences in total, excluding those cases where it does not perform a comparative function, for example when preceding time clauses.

Table 1 shows 4 types of similes according to whether they depict concrete or abstract images in the source and/or in the target domain. As can be seen, the choice of Concrete/Concrete images in both domains is the most frequent (52.4%). This result confirms the occurrence of images as tangible objects in architectural discourse (Caballero, 2003; Caballero, 2006). Some of the identified lexical combinations "*structural skeleton"; "living entity"* have practically become conventional by now.

In the Concrete-Abstract similes (28.6%), concrete images are highlighted to make abstract concepts more accessible. For example in "*Having taken the Shushan Mountain as inspiration*", the attention is first drawn to a mountain that is then compared to an abstract concept (inspiration). Similarly, in "Pavilions would be used *as spaces",* "pavilions" is emphasized by being situated initially. The Abstract-Concrete similes (9.5%) are illustrative of the use of particular images to facilitate comprehension, while in Abstract-Abstract similes (9.5%) students try to be meaningful in a non-figurative way.

Table 1: Images found in AS- similes: Examples and percentages

Type of images	**AS- Similes**	**%**
Concrete-concrete	-The elevator cores serve *as the structural skeleton of the tower.* -The hill viewed *not as a static element but as a living entity.*	52.4
Concrete-abstract	-Having taken the Shushan Mountain *as inspiration.* - Pavilions would be used *as spaces.*	28.6
Abstract-concrete	-Using architecture *as a tool to help communities*.	9.5
Abstract-abstract	-Understanding architecture *as a combination of creativity, context and functionality*.	9.5

4.2. "Like" Similes: Results and Discussion

"Like" similes occur 79 times in the corpus, excluding cases in which this particle does not convey comparison. According to their grammatical structure we identified three major types of similes in this group (see Table 2):

1. Noun Phrase–Noun Phrase (NP-NP) occurring in the source and target domain. The source domain generates visual input: *a barrier, a giant membrane, the wings of a bird* that highlights elements of the target domain: *roof(s)*, *wall.* This group comprises 15% of the occurrences.
2. Clause-Clause. The similes in this group (35%) are more complex and are usually instantiated by the expressions "FEEL LIKE" and "LOOK LIKE".
    a. The expression "FEEL LIKE" denotes a particular type of experience or impression. The chosen images are associated with qualifiers such as "giant, little, colorful, magical" for descriptive purposes.

b. Alternatively, the use of "LOOK LIKE" often encapsulates some kind of perception or can be used to describe a specific building:

3. Clause-Noun Phrase (Clause-NP): In this group, nouns preceded by adjectives are likely to produce novel lexical combinations or collocates:

"*digital cloud", "giant colorful factory"*
"musical composition", "physical bridge",
"small hills", "tent-like structure", "living object"

Lexical combinations include visual, auditory and tactile images and represent the highest amount of occurrences (50%).

Table 2: Phraseological structures of LIKE Similes: Examples and Percentages

Structure	LIKE Similes	%
NP-NP	-A big pink wall to the exterior *like a barrier.* - The building's roofs almost *like wings of a bird.*	15
Clause-Clause	-The center feels *more like you are in a giant sculpture rather than in a functional building.* -The courtyard makes you feel *like you were in a little jungle.* - This way of being supported makes *Edificio Castelar looks like it is floating.*	35
Clause-NP	-A building that looks so closed from the outside *almost like a bunker*. - (Pompidou centre) looked *like a giant colorful factory.* -A transparent structure made of white steel poles that appeared *like a digital cloud.* -The result almost looks *like a musical composition.*	50

In sum, the affluence of nominal groups in similes proves to be an effective way to generate collocates and word combinations. An extensive use of concrete images is found to be the most common trait of such combinations. This seems to be a relevant feature within the rhetorical conventions of the architectural community that typically adopts the use of similes to communicate their ideas and designs.

CONCLUSIONS

The research questions formulated at the beginning were addressed in the different sections of this work. In general, the data obtained indicate that students' capacity to express architectural figurative language by using suitable phraseology develops steadily. The corpus

analysis enables us to claim that figurative language is mostly exemplified by the use of metaphor, metonymy, similes and amplification. We have also verified that the phraseology chosen in nearly all cases entails lexical and grammatical arrangements intended to reinforce the figurative expressions. Such is the case of lexical combinations of qualifiers and nouns functioning as descriptive attributives, and also the use of creative similes illustrated through concrete imagery.

The present study also includes interesting insights in the genre of academic essays, such as identifying the use of figurative language in its different sections (Title, Introduction, Development and Conclusions) and showing that imagery use occurs in all of them, especially in the development where students provide data, examples and build up arguments by means of metaphorical language. Furthermore, the presence of figurative jargon in other parts of the essay is also significant because it heightens its structural integrity and reinforces textual cohesion. In the title this is apparent by drawing the readers' attention to personified metaphors, in the introduction by the design of specific images and similes and in the conclusion by figuratively highlighting specific major points previously discussed.

Assuming that the ability to collocate words effectively can be a method to streamline figurative language use, it is advisable for prospective research to promote evaluative tools, such as focused rubrics, to measure students' progress in developing the integration of visual and writing skills in the specialized discourse of architecture.

All in all, students are yet in the process of encoding and creating narratives to transmit successfully their knowledge into words and to develop visual thinking. Thus, the results of this work can facilitate the analysis of academic achievement in architectural communication by highlighting both current knowledge and pending tasks.

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