

# Etelka Szabó: The Theory and Taxonomy of Tropes in 16<sup>th</sup> Century French Ramist Rhetoric

## Summary (English version)

My PhD-dissertation proposes to analyse in detail the theories and possible taxonomies of tropes elaborated by a 16<sup>th</sup> century French linguist, Pierre de la Ramée, and his colleagues, Omer Talon and Antoine Fouquelin. From 1545 on, Ramée, one of the greatest innovators of rhetoric, led the rhetorical work at the Collège de Presles, which included working with Talon and Fouquelin. These eminent linguists published their momentous rhetorical-poetical and logical works, both in French and Latin, from 1545 until 1562, when Talon's early death and Ramée's conversion to Protestantism put an end to their cooperation. My analysis is devoted to the works published during the period mentioned above.

Understanding tropes and non-tropes as results of mental processes is confronting long-debated questions in linguistic studies: how to distinguish tropes from non-tropes; how to explain and interpret tropes; and how to classify them. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ramist approach to rhetoric, reconsidering and rethinking ancient interpretations is central in finding answers to these questions. Contemporary researches (Ong 1958, Knox 1989, Goyet 1990, Magnien 1994) have appreciated Ramée's linguistic works for their original approach to their object and the specific fields of rhetoric studied in them. However, the specific conceptions of tropes and figures in these works equally deserve attention. Ramist rhetoric, a remarkable synthesis of Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, involves Melanchthon's observations as well, and thus figures as a synthesis of ancient and contemporary works of European rhetoric. Nevertheless, Ramist rhetoric does not fail to produce its own particular results either.

The objectives of the present study are to investigate:

- How do Ramée and his companions classify a specific linguistic phenomenon in their system? Is the phenomenon considered as a trope or a figure; is it necessarily a trope, or are other classifications also possible? Are there any unclassifiable cases?
- What term do they choose to name a trope? If a newly coined term deviates from the traditional ways of naming, is it necessarily a better expression?
- What are the properties that determine a particular trope? Can we grasp the *differentia specifica* which identifies a given trope and distinguishes it from related formations?
- With regard to the 16<sup>th</sup> century knowledge of linguistics and communication, how can Ramée and his colleagues explain the mental processes which result in tropes? What motivations determine the creation of a given trope?
- Is it possible to attribute certain priorities to some tropes? Is there a hierarchy inherent in the system of tropes?
- Is there any secondary classification within the traditional system of tropes? What are the criteria which determine a given classification? From the point of view of modern and mainly cognitive linguistic approaches, is it necessary to retain the Ramist categorisation of tropes and figures?
- What effects do tropes produce? Are they inevitably mere ornaments of speech or do they play considerably more important roles?
- Can we consider their occurrence 'typical' in certain types of texts? Is there a definite borderline between the artistic and non-artistic application of tropes?

- Which rhetorical phenomena are the closest to the trope in question? What are the differences between a trope and its related formations? If their distinction shows theoretical problems, would it be more reasonable to treat them as one category?
- Is the system presented above to be completed; and if so, in what way?

Apart from the analysis mentioned above, in my dissertation I propose to re-consider the examples which the authors quote to explain the mechanism of the tropes. The analysis of these examples reveals the process of creating definitions (as well as the possible self-contradictions and faults inherent in them) and helps to find strategies of interpretation.

In order to analyse French (Ramist) taxonomies and conceptions of tropes in detail, their theoretical and linguistic frames need to be reconstructed. Such a reconstruction implies the investigation of ancient and Renaissance conceptions of tropes, which deeply influenced the tropic theories of the Collège de Presles. The richness of classical Greek and Latin rhetoric and their continuation in the works of humanist authors makes a detailed survey impossible within the range of my dissertation. Therefore I propose to provide only an overview of the most important conceptions which served as the basis of Ramée's rhetoric. Such an overview is necessary for analysing and reinterpreting Ramist conceptions of tropes, as, according to Renaissance theories, the originality of any conception is only to be grasped within the pattern of *imitatio*, that is, the imitation of the classics.

In my opinion, a thematic approach is the most adequate way to reveal the similarities, differences and contradictions involved in certain definitions; and to reveal the aspects that determine the analysis of a trope in question. For this reason I apply this conception in my dissertation. Apart from the advantages mentioned above, a thematic approach also shows the very flexibility of Ramist classification. The order of the chapters, arranged according to the degree of affinity of the tropes, and their frequency in everyday speech and poetry, more or less follows the Ramist method.

Every chapter ends with a brief recapitulation of the interpretations of the given trope, which surveys the clarity of that particular conception. A comparison of the results of the theoretical approach and the conclusions issued from the empirical analysis of examples—two basic aspects of descriptive analyses—produces the most important result of my dissertation. In every case, the results of the empirical analysis suggest that linguistic phenomena are not necessarily classified in a perfect correspondence with the criteria defining a given trope. Thus, besides prototypical formations, a great number of atypical cases should also be taken into consideration. The classification of these atypical formations depends only on the author's rhetoric and linguistic competence, which will result in different categorisations in almost every case. Moreover, certain tropes—like irony or allegory—surpass the frames of linguistic interpretation, and therefore are not to be typified merely by rhetorical methods. For the reasons mentioned, every chapter ends with a brief recapitulation of the definitions of the trope in question, which permits to demonstrate the unfixedness of the system and emphasizes the relevance of the problem.

The tropes presented in my dissertation have not been considered only as tropes in the long history of rhetoric. In my dissertation I take this into consideration. However, I propose to include all the formations classified as tropes in the Ramist rhetorical system, as well as the formations which, regarding the quoted examples, should have been classified as tropes. In my study I intend to treat these latter formations as tropes. I only mention the possibility of another classification (as figures) in those particular cases when Ramée and his disciples also emphasize the ambiguous nature of the given formation.

Whenever a statement comes into contradiction with the definition or with the sources, I offer a brief critique, aware of the fact that we cannot expect modern linguistic analysis from ancient and Renaissance authors. For that reason I present Greek, Latin and Renaissance literature only in a descriptive way, although not failing to emphasize those statements which

modern linguists consider significant as well. Nevertheless, the passages treating 16<sup>th</sup> century interpretations of tropes do offer a wide range of theories, with different conclusions. These latter conceptions need to be considered whenever their definitions are based on the primary sources also applied by Ramée and his disciples. On the other hand, the passages presenting the greatest Renaissance theories of tropes permit an implicit critique of the Ramist theory, too, and they demonstrate the ways in which Ramist conceptions surpass (or fall behind) 16<sup>th</sup> century European rhetoric.

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