

## PATTERNS OF COMPARISON: COMPATIBLE AND CLASHING SIMILES IN A CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN NOVEL

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### Abstract

In this study, I investigate similes in the language of the narrator of a contemporary Hungarian novel applying the theoretical perspective of cognitive linguistics and the methods of corpus stylistics. The analysis aims at demonstrating that similes have a huge importance in the texture of the novel: through them, the text confronts its reader with serious challenges in cognition as well as in the narrative representation of events. My argument is that simile is not as simple as it is widely assumed to be in the stylistic literature. The present analysis, which adopts the principle of conceptual directionality and elaborates a fine-grained system of categories, aims at shedding new light on the cognitive potential of simile. The results of analysing the novel as a corpus demonstrate that more or less incompatible similes have almost the same frequency in the text as compatible structures. Consequently, one of the main strategies of the narration is to modify the process of construing analogical meaning expected by the reader.

**Keywords:** principle of directionality, compatible simile, clashing simile, texture, corpus stylistics

### 1. Introduction

“It is demon what I’m saying, but I mean something else of course”<sup>1</sup> – this is the emblematic sentence of the narrator in the Hungarian novel *Kitömött barbár* (The Stuffed Barbarian) by Gergely Péterfy, which can serve as a good vantage point for this study. Why does the narrator, Sophie Török (the wife of Ferenc Kazinczy, a famous author of the Hungarian enlightenment) use the word *demon*? Why does she use it even though she lets us know at the same time that it is not the appropriate expression for representing her thinking? And why does she explicate the figurative references of the noun *demon* (which is a metaphor considering its linguistic symbolization)<sup>2</sup> after creating it (1)?

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<sup>1</sup> Translations from the Hungarian original are by the author of the present paper, Gábor Simon.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is a dividing line between metaphor and simile in the rhetoric tradition (see e.g. Huhmann 2007: 89; Thornborrow–Wareing 2005: 79), cognitive linguistics considers simile as a type of metaphor (see e.g. Shen 2008; Steen et al. 2010: 21; see also Nørgaard–Montoro–Busse 2010: 107 for the historical precedents of this view). Despite this theoretical vantage point, distinguishing between metaphor and simile has remained productive in the cognitive poetic literature. Peter Stockwell (2002: 15–107) considers the distinction useful since it draws attention to more than one possible realization of a conceptual configuration. Peter Crisp (2003: 106) reminds us that “[I]inguistic metaphor and simile are [...] alternative ways of expressing conceptual (or) image metaphor linguistically”. We can conclude that the more an analysis focuses on the linguistic structure of a con-

- (1) He was humiliated by not being able to defeat the demons who had taken the power over his body away from him. It is demon what I'm saying, but I mean something else of course: they were the torturing memories of the prison, the awful recollections of closeness and humiliation, that could stop the flow of time (...).

In the passage above (Péterfy 2014: 61), the narrator uses a word (*demon*) metaphorically, then she details the figurative referents of it (the torturing memories of the prison, the awful recollections of closeness and humiliation), meanwhile, she expresses her doubt in the adequacy of her (metaphoric) language use. In other words, she both accepts and rejects the analogy created in language, maintaining it on the level of conceptualization in her explanation about the figurative references of the noun *demon*, but also withdrawing its expressing potentiality on the level of linguistic symbolization.

Two possible consequences can be drawn from this observation. The first refers to understanding metaphoric meaning in literature:<sup>3</sup> the passage directs the reader's attention to the possibility of developing an authentic reading without figuratively identifying the target concepts with metaphoric sources. The language used by the narrator affords the possibility of metaphoric conceptualization, but at the same time, it also distances the reader from obvious metaphoric meaning creation, i.e. from the conventional way of comprehending a literary text. The second consequence concerns the linguistic realization of metaphoric conceptualization: the analysis of figurative language must not be reduced to modelling metaphoric source and target, as well as mappings between them, i.e. to the conceptual structure motivating the linguistic expression. The way of expressing analogy in language becomes a central factor in a cognitive poetic investigation. Peter Stockwell (2009: 5) defines the endeavour of cognitive poetics as follows. "Fundamental to our extraordinary adaptability as a species and feats of soaring creativity, imagination and invention is the capacity for metaphorical projection that allows immediate objects to become transformed into ideas, speculations, rationalisations, hypotheses, and rich imaginary worlds. The business of cognitive poetics is not to reduce any of this to structural types or labels, but to understand its intricate workings and marvel at the new adaptations that our capacities continue to allow."

At this point, it is worth noting that there is another usage of the noun *demon* in the text referring to the brothers of the protagonist (Ferenc Kazinczy) but not as a linguistic metaphor (2).

- (2) As he was lying in the room on that hopeless day in December while his brothers were walking up and down around his bed like two *demons* and they bit into him from time to time, Ferenc felt that the thought of knowing his mother's secret could not protect him (...).

The aim of figurative language use here is to represent the complexity of the feelings of the protagonist (Ferenc, the husband of the narrator). In this case, however, the narrator creates a

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ceptualization the more it is considered fruitful to make a distinction between simile and metaphor. The present study adopts a corpus linguistic methodology with an emphasis on linguistic structure in order to find relevant data, thus I differentiate simile from metaphor regarding their linguistic realization, without rejecting that they share the common conceptual organization of cross-domain mappings and analogy.

<sup>3</sup> As Steen (1989: 118) puts it, "understanding metaphor in literature is approached as a special and specific subtype of understanding metaphor in general that is ruled by the general socio-cultural conventions regulating all literary discourses". The ambiguous attitude toward metaphoric language in the narration seems to be a reflection on the cultural conventions of metaphorization in literary works of art.

**simile** that does not claim that the brothers are demons; they only resemble demons. It is not obvious whether there are some physical attributes according to which the brothers look like demons or it is their behaviour (e.g. their gait or their aggression) which can be considered demonic. Moreover, it is also uncertain whether the impression comes from the perspective of the protagonist, it is shared with the narrator or it is the result of the narrator's imagination.

As it can be seen from the examples, the figurative language of the contemporary Hungarian novel sets the reader a big challenge. It comes not only from the dense metaphoricity of the text (considering the creativity and complex interpretation of the leitmotif in the title, the multiple meanings of being stuffed and barbarism) but also from the rich patterns of similes and other types of linguistic comparison in the narration.

In this study, I investigate the similes in Sophie's language applying the theoretical perspective of cognitive linguistics and the methods of corpus stylistics. The analysis aims at demonstrating that similes have a huge importance in the texture<sup>4</sup> of the novel: through them, the text confronts its reader with serious challenges in cognition as well as in the narrative representation of events.

In the retrospective narration of the novel, similes function as the poetic devices for reconstructing events from previous impressions. Creating similes, however, helps Sophie to reflect also on the multiple ways of construing and sharing meaning. As it is defined in handbooks (e.g. Thornborrow–Wareing 2005: 78; Simpson 2004: 43–44) a simile declares an explicit connection, a comparison between two concepts; moreover, it represents this connection in the domain of subjective consciousness. In other words, Sophie develops her language for representing the events of the text world.

Thus, the language of similes (i.e. the language of the female narrator in the novel) is apt for describing the feelings, impressions, and imaginations of not only her mind but also of the male characters: the two protagonists (her husband and his Afro-American friend, Angelo Soliman), her alchemist father and the other intellectuals of the era, as well as the political and familial enemies of her husband. Creating a new language to defeat the rivals in the field of culture is the explicit ideological aim of the husband, Ferenc Kazinczy in the novel; for Sophie, however, it is essential for telling a story about power and overcoming, about illusion and reality, and about the complexity of cognizing the world. The process of creating a new language has its metaphoric significance regarding the narrated events but it also has metanarrative importance in the act of narration itself.

Because of the explicitness of comparing two entities on the one hand, and since comparison always provides a subjective and hence autonomous point of view (from which a similarity of the two entities is perceived), similes can be considered the pitfalls of cognition. They offer the ease of comprehension and the illusion of imaginative liveliness but at the same time, they distance<sup>5</sup> the reader from directly experiencing the scenes because of the explicit reference to a cognizing perspective and an act of subjective representation.

Consequently, my argument is that simile is not as simple as it is widely assumed to be in the stylistic literature (see e.g. Simpson 2004: 80). According to this tradition (which goes back to Jakobson, Genette and Aristotle, see e.g. Bethlehem 1996) simile as an explicit com-

<sup>4</sup> In the study I use the term *texture* in a Stockwellian sense: "Readings consist of the interaction of texts and humans. Humans are comprised of minds, bodies and shared experiences. Texts are the objects produced by people drawing on these resources. Textuality is the outcome of the workings of shared cognitive mechanics, evident in texts and readings. Texture is the experienced quality of textuality" (Stockwell 2009: 1).

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Black (1993: 44) claims that simile can have a "distancing effect" for it belongs to a „more analytical mode of thought" than metaphor.

parison is considered the younger sister (or the maid) of metaphor: it is easier to identify, its linguistic variability is much more limited than the patterns of metaphor, and it serves as a testing device for distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy; thus it is a less sophisticated way of imagination than metaphoric language.

But some previous studies (see for example Black 1993), as well as recent investigations (Tartakovsky–Shen 2019; Tartakovsky et al. 2019), have drawn our attention to the both linguistic and semantic complexity of similes extending from conventional structures to non-conventional and creative ones. The present analysis aims at demonstrating the richness of comparisons in a contemporary Hungarian novel and shedding new light on the cognitive potential of simile, which deserves attention in its own right. In other words, I would like to release simile from its subordinate role.

The study scrutinizes the pattern of similes in the novel in five sections. After the Introduction, I provide the aspects and categories of the analysis adopted from previous works on similes in traditional rhetoric and cognitive poetics (2). Then the investigated material and the methods of the analysis are detailed (3). The fourth section demonstrates and discusses the results of the analysis: the types of similes in the novel and their distribution in the text (4). The study ends with concluding remarks (5) about the most important findings of the investigation.

## 2. Theoretical issues in simile analysis

### 2.1. Simile, similarity, figurativity

A simile is “a way of comparing one thing with another, of explaining what one thing is like by showing how it is similar to another thing, and it explicitly signals itself in a text, with the words *as* or *like*” (Thornborrow–Wareing 2005: 78). It is clear from this definition that simile is one of the devices of expressing an act of comparison, and on the other hand it is a similarity that motivates the meaning of a simile. Though the latter would seem to be tautological, in fact, similarity is a complex cognitive phenomenon. It can extend from the literal resemblance of two entities to a felt quality of partial analogy between things, ideas, events, etc.

Thus, not every simile is based on factual similarity: there is plenty of creative (or non-literal) expression which creates (and not expresses) an analogy between entities (for example the wind is as sharp as a knife), and the perceptual and/or conceptual distance between them (or their dissimilarity) can serve as one of the basic factors of the simile’s figurativity.

Bethlehem (1996), as well as Fishelov (1993) register the following semantic factors as constituting a figurative (non-literal) simile: the polysemous or abstract nature of the ground of comparison (what does sharp mean in the example above), the semantic density (or the linguistic elaboratedness) of the topic of a simile (e.g. the wild west wind carrying new weather), the unfamiliarity of the entity to which something is compared, to mention only some of them. (For a more detailed discussion see 2.2.)

These studies make it clear that the figurativity of a simile is motivated by the relationship between the compared entities: it can be an abstract quality, a less salient (or even non-comprehensible) property of one or another (*La terre est bleue comme une orange* ‘the earth is blue like an orange’ as the passage from Éluard’s poem claims), a polysemous meaning of the terms (and hence semantic vagueness in the comparison), a metonymic link between the entity and the ground of comparison (e.g. *crook as Rookwood* (in Australian English), in which *Rookwood* refers to a cemetery in Sydney, and this reference motivates metonymically the act of comparison). Moreover, one can easily find a metaphoric interpretation of the ground in

colloquial English similes: *as busy as a bee*, *as cold as a cucumber* or *as free as a bird* – these expressions can only be comprehended if one interprets the property metaphorically.

Consequently, similes are by no means confined to expressing literal resemblance. They provide various ways of establishing analogy, therefore their conceptualizing and symbolizing potential goes far beyond the function of making metaphors explicit. In this study, I regard simile as an autonomous process of figurative meaning creation, which has some overlapping characteristics with (conceptual) metaphor and metonymy (namely a complex link between the compared entities based on a shift in a conceptual frame or on conceptual mappings), but it can be reduced neither to literal resemblance nor to an elaborated form of metaphor. Whether we treat metaphor and simile as two kinds of expressing metaphorical (or non-literal) similarity (see Ortony et al. 1985), or consider them opposing categories (as Black (1993) or Fishelov (2007) does), we need further empirical data and fine-grained analyses about the semantic variability of similes in poetic texts. The present paper contributes to this endeavour.

## 2.2. Structure and categories

As it became clear in the previous sections, simile theory has a long historical tradition with numerous approaches in it. To begin with an ancient predecessor: Cicero argues that comparison (which is a broader category than simile) has three subdivisions (De Inventione I, 49, see Cicero 1968: 89–90; Lausberg 1960: 232): parallel (*imago*), which relies on the resemblances between people or things; example (*exemplum*), i.e. some kind of analogy with a historical event or character; and similitude (*collation*), which expresses a likeness of individuals or events motivated by experiences. The differentiation elaborated in ancient rhetoric shows that the figure of simile is far from being homogenous and simple. Because of rejecting literal similarity as the motivation of figurative meaning in similes, and for the sake of generalization, I narrowed down the focus of my investigation to similitudes (or non-literal similes) occurring in the narration of Sophie Török, omitting both parallels and examples from the examination.

A non-literal simile creates a partial similarity or resemblance (and hence implies a partial asymmetry) between two entities, which is motivated by a limited identification of two things; as Kocsány (2008: 267) defines it, in this type of comparison “an inference arising from a known relation of things is recognized as valid for new relations that need to be illuminated”.

The canonical structure of a simile is A is as G as B (Tartakovsky et al. 2019: 185) or A be X / do X like B, where A and B are the compared entities and G is the ground of comparison. According to Fishelov (1993: 5) simile is constituted by four components: the topic (or target: T, “the thing about which the speaker speaking”), the vehicle (or source: V, “the image brought into the discussion because of its being analogous to T”), the simile marker (M, “some sort of explicit marker that directs us to construct analogies (...) between T and V”) and the ground (or tertium comparationis with an ancient term, G, “the aspect(s) shared by T and V, that is, the basis of the analogy between T and V”).<sup>6</sup> In a prototypical simile, every component becomes explicated.

- (3) [Ferenc’s enemies] disappear in the ceased dimension like the pigeon in the magic box of the magician

<sup>6</sup> The components of a simile are termed in different ways in the literature. In order to harmonize with the cognitive linguistic terminology I use the terms *source* and *target* instead of *vehicle* and *topic* in the paper.

The expression in (3) compares the enemies of the protagonist with the pigeon in a spectacle, the ground expressed by the event of disappearing and the marker of the simile is the conjunction *like*. Since the ground is explicit, the simile is motivated (using Zalabai's term, see Zalabai 1981: 141), or closed (in Beardsley's term, see Beardsley 1958: 137–138) contrary to unmotivated (or open) similes that only imply the basis of the analogy (4).

(4) time must become ripe like the cedar tree for splitting

Motivatedness (or closeness) is no doubt a promising and productive aspect of simile analysis; nevertheless, it raises difficult questions since in expressions including an adjective (5), the explicitness of the ground has a different degree than in expressions with a verbal form (6).<sup>7</sup> Thus, first of all, the scale of explicitness or motivatedness would need to be clear as a prerequisite of the analysis. Such a preliminary study is beyond the scope of this paper.

(5) The peasants [...] were wild and cruel like children

(6) [Pietro Angiola] hooted, crouched down then jumped up [...] like a chimpanzee

Another aspect of the organization of a simile is its cognitive path (Fishelov 1993: 6, Kocsány 2008: 272–273), i.e. which component becomes foregrounded in the expression: the target or the source. In this respect, the default arrangement in the investigated novel is the target > source order: only 8% of the analysed data deviates from this pattern. Thus, inversion is not a typical solution in the narration, and hence cognitive path proved not to be a productive factor for the analysis.

However, if we direct our attention to the directionality of conceptualization instead of the linear order of the components, new categories of simile can be established, and they can give an account of the complexity of narrative voice. As Shen (2008: 296) points out, the principle of directionality is the main organizing basis for both metaphorical conceptualizations and the meaning of simile. According to this principle, the source domain of the conceptual structure (i.e. the vehicle in similes) is conceptually more accessible (more concrete or salient) than the target domain (the topic in similes). In other words, the entity to which the target is compared is more embedded into our everyday experience: we have direct knowledge about it, and hence it can serve as the vehicle of an analogy (see also explicitness, salience, and familiarity in non-poetic similes in Fishelov 1993).

Yet there are similes that diverge from this tendency: they are clashing similes (CLS) in which it is the target that is more concrete or salient, as opposed to compatible similes (COS) which are organized on the basis of the directionality principle (Shen 2008: 297). In terms of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008), the directionality principle helps us describe the semantic schema of similes: COSs are the instantiations of the schema with no extension, whereas an increase in the elaborative distance from the schema yields CLSs.

The notion of conceptual directionality as well as the categories of COS and CLS make it possible to analyse the cognitive acts of comparisons in Sophie's narration and to describe the ways of conceptual access to the entities of the discourse world. Nevertheless, the binarity of conceptual organization in the model cannot provide us an elaborated scale for pattern analysis,

<sup>7</sup> In a recent corpus-based study of poetic similes, expressions that include verbs or adverbs were considered closed similes because of the sufficient explication of the ground (see Tartakovsky–Shen 2019: 210). It suggests that closeness is a matter of degree and the grammatical structure of similes needs to be taken into consideration.

since there is more than one possible way of deviating from the directionality principle. Fishelov (1993: 6–14), describes several types of non-conventional similes.<sup>8</sup> A simile can become peculiar if it details the source rather than the target, for it directs the reader’s attention to the former despite the fact that a “simile’s communicational goal is giving information about the target [topic] via the highly compatible source and ground” (Tartakovsky et al. 2019: 188; addition is mine). A simile turns more prominent if the reader’s knowledge about the source is insufficient or less than about the target: in this case, understanding the simile requires special encyclopaedic or linguistic knowledge. The most complex type of non-conventionality is when the source of the comparison is unknown: Fishelov (1993: 9) calls it “emptying the source”, his example is (7).

(7) John is eating like something I cannot imagine.

The various degrees of the accessibility of the source in Hungarian similes are demonstrated in a similar way by Kocsány (2008: 276–279): in her dataset, the source can be insufficiently explicated or too general; it can be more abstract than the target; another case is when the source does not exist and cannot be experienced in everyday life; or one of the components is metaphoric or metonymic. Thus, the present analysis has elaborated precedents in both international and Hungarian linguistics. However, my aim is not only to recapitulate and adopt the previous findings and categories in a new research but also to refine the category system of non-conventional similes in order to gain a more comprehensive view of their patterns and to provide a better understanding of their function in the texture of a novel.

### 2.3. The categories of the present analysis

One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from the literature is that binary categorization (compatible versus clashing similes) is not apt for a fine-grained qualitative analysis: several intermediate cases can be assumed in between the two extreme types. Consequently, in this study, I establish a scale from conventional (COS) similes to unconventional (CLS) ones. Moreover, I deal with the non-conventional types of simile in Péterfy’s novel as subtypes of COS, considering an expression CLS if and only if the vehicle is completely inaccessible or non-salient from the perspective of the everyday knowledge of the reader. I elaborated the following system of categories.

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the category of non-conventional similes has been termed differently in the literature: though Fishelov (1993) calls it *poetic simile*, Shen (2008) proposes the term *clashing simile*, whereas Tartakovsky et al. (2019) and Tartakovsky–Shen (2019) uses the expression *non-standard simile* (with *non-standard poetic simile* as its subcategory). The difference between the terms depends on the definition of non-conventionality (e.g. the prominence of the vehicle as opposed to the topic, the deviation from the directionality principle or the salience of the ground in relation to the vehicle). Since I basically adapt the directionality principle proposed by Shen (2008), I use the term *clashing simile* in this study.

Category	Description	Example
i. Conventional similes or <b>COSs</b>	The members in this category are motivated by the everyday knowledge of the reader, thus the reader is familiar with the source and the ground is salient in relation to it.	[in the course of dissection] <i>the eye of the scientist reads them</i> [the signs on the surface of the body] <i>like a pupil reads the alphabet</i>
ii. <b>COS TA</b> (Topic Accessibility)	The target is more detailed and elaborated hence more accessible than the source.	[the wings of the butterfly] <i>came together with the scale in the corner of the tissue paper like ash</i>
iii. <b>COS SSpec</b> (Source Specificity)	In this category, the comprehension of the source requires specific and non-conventional knowledge of the world.	[The gaze of Ferenc] <i>became dim and doubtful, then it separated mine like when the mating ladybirds split up suddenly in the air and fly on alone</i>
iv. <b>COS R</b> (Role)	In this category of similes, the source represents a specific social role and the comparison can be construed through taking over the vantage point offered in the situation.	<i>Like in animals, which have a presentiment of an earthquake, a deep alarm ringed in me</i>
v. <b>COS M</b> (Metaphor)	The source of the simile ( <i>the hell of the prison</i> in the example) is a linguistic metaphor in itself.	<i>they had made his life a much darker hell than it had been the hell of the prison</i>
vi. <b>COS Mn</b> (Metonymy)	The meaning of the source in the simile is construed metonymically.	[The story on Angelo] <i>burst him</i> [Ferenc] <i>as time bursts the old rafters</i>
vii. Clashing similes or <b>CLSs</b>	The source is inaccessible, hardly accessible, not concrete or unknown.	<i>we</i> [Ferenc and Sophie] <i>mean both the sole and perfect solution at that for one another, like the elements desiring one another in the symbolism of alchemy</i>



One end of the continuum is the subcategory of compatible similes. Although the topic, the process of dissection is a very specific experience, every reader has some experiences on having been a pupil, thus the vehicle of the simile is concrete and accessible. The category of COS TA is based on asymmetry between source and target: as opposed to conventional similes it is the target which is more elaborated (and hence more familiar for the reader). The examples above also demonstrate that there is no rigid boundary between categories. In the case of COS and COS SSpec, for instance, the source of the latter refers to an event or act which cannot be considered a shared experience: it refers to specific and/or individual observations in this case.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that in similes organized around a role the source can be diverse: from well-known and typical positions to the perspectives of non-human or other specific characters. In the example above, it is the role of a fleeing animal that is presented in the expression for elaborating the state of mind of the narrator. The subtle distinction between a specific source and a role-based source is that the latter is motivated by taking over another perspective (which is not that of the narrator or one of the characters), thus it exploits our mentalizing capacity.

Probably the most complex categories are the metaphorical and metonymic similes, or – to be more accurate – those expressions in which the source is a linguistic metaphor or metonymy. In section 2.1., I argued that simile cannot be reduced to expressing a metaphor, and though there is a common conceptual base in the background of both phenomena (namely the principle of directionality and some kind of metaphorical similarity), I do not consider simile a subtype of metaphors. From this it follows that a simile can be motivated by other cross-domain mappings, in other words, the source can be metaphorical in itself.<sup>10</sup> For example, *the hell of the prison* is inherently metaphoric (based on the conceptual metaphors of PRISON IS HELL and EVIL IS DARK), and processing these conceptualizations is the prerequisite of the comprehension of the simile, which compares the metaphoric darkness of the actual life to the former phase of it. We can use the metonymic category in a similar way: since the bursting of the rafters is the consequence of the progress of time, thus there is a metonymic conceptualization (THE RESULT OF A PROCESS STANDS FOR THE PROCESS) in the background of the source.

At the other end of the continuum of similes, we find the domain of clashing similes. In the example above, the knowledge of alchemy is rather specific; furthermore, it becomes unreliable and available only for the initiated in the novel. Therefore, clashing similes make not only the narration expressive but also the process of reading unstable and difficult.

The elaborated system of similes is detailed and sophisticated enough to explore the pattern and functioning of comparisons in the narration. Although there are other aspects of non-conventionality in simile analysis, I have preferred the notions of conceptual accessibility and directionality as central factors of the examination. The next section discusses the process of data collection, the number of analysed expressions as well as the methods of the study.

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<sup>9</sup> It depends partly on the reader's experiences what counts as a familiar or specific source. However, the aim of this categorization is a qualitative exploration of the semantic variability of similes in a novel, and not elaborating a schema of annotation for a corpus-driven investigation. The latter would need a more consensual distinction between the categories.

<sup>10</sup> In the study I use the notions of metaphor and metonymy in accordance with the standard conceptual theory elaborated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in cognitive linguistics (see e.g. Lakoff 2006). I use the terms metaphor and metonymy in reference to conceptualizations and distinguish linguistic metaphors and metonymies from them. However, the cognitive poetic perspective of this study implies that the linguistic realizations of conceptual structures are not of secondary importance, and this theoretical vantage point has the consequence that I do not subsume similes under metaphors.

### 3. Material and methods

Using the terms of corpus stylistics the novel consists of 115119 tokens and 30661 types.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the prototypical simile marker of Hungarian, the *mint* ('like' or 'as') conjunction the data support the reader's assumption that similes are one of the basic figures in the narration. The conjunction occurs 519 times in the text, it is the 13<sup>th</sup> most frequent type of the corpus (only other grammatical words, e.g. articles, the negative particle, the conjunctions *és* 'and', *hogy* 'that', *de* 'but', as well as preverbal elements and particles have precedence over it). Though not every occurrence of the conjunction *mint* serves as simile marker (it is one of the essive-formal case markers in Hungarian), moreover other acts of comparison (resemblances, examples) are among the data, the frequency of the conjunction *mint* is still notable: in the printed edition of the novel every page contains one simile on average. The distribution of the conjunction is demonstrated in Figure 1 with the concordance plot made by AntConc.



Figure 1. The distribution of the conjunction *mint* in the novel

In the Figure above the vertical lines count as the occurrences of the conjunction, consequently the thicker the line the more frequent the word in that part of the text. Although it illustrates the distribution of *mint* before manually filtering the sample, one can conclude from it that the frequency of the conjunction is even in the whole novel, with denser areas at some points of the narration.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the prototypical expression of simile in Hungarian (i.e. with the conjunction *mint*), two other structures were investigated (without aiming for a comprehensive exploration of the linguistic variability of similes in Hungarian): the use of the case marker *-ként* ('as', see Rounds 2001: 116) and the use of the conjunction *akár* ('just like'). The former occurs 171 times in the novel but most of them function as essive-formal case markers (*transzcendentális birodalom nagykövet-e-ként*, transcendental empire ambassador-POSS-ESS 'as the ambassador of a transcendental empire'), as (distributive-) temporal case markers (*reggel-enként* morning-DIST 'in the mornings'), as distributive markers (*egy-enként* one-DIST 'one by one', *csepp-enként* drop-DIST 'drop by drop'), or in lexicalized expressions (*egyébként*, 'anyway'). After thorough manual filtering only 16 expressions with *-ként* remained among the data.

Finally, the occurrences of the conjunction *akár* were analysed in order to compare the proportion of it with the prototypical form of a simile. However, the conjunction has only one occurrence in the novel (*a mag, akár a férfitest magja* 'the nucleus just like the sperm of the male body') which functions as identifying two entities with each other: it illustrates the total identity of the basic principles of alchemy and physiology in the explanation of the narrator's father (who is one of the leading alchemists in the world of the novel). As a parallelism (or imago/parallel with the term of Cicero) this expression was omitted from the pattern.

<sup>11</sup> A general introduction to the field of corpus stylistics: Gibbson–Whiteley (2018: 285–300). For processing the novel as a corpus, I used the AntConc software (v. 3.5.8 (Windows) 2019).

<sup>12</sup> I do not dwell on the relationship between the distribution of similes and the structure or development of the narration in the paper, but it can be another interesting aspect for further analyses.

After the process of data collection, a qualitative analysis was accomplished in order to obtain the non-literal similes from the data. First, those expressions were removed which do not express similarity but other aspects of entities (e.g. their state or manner: *az egész testvérszerелеm nem volt más, mint egy kétségbeesett kiáltás azért, hogy apám figyeljen rá* ‘the whole love between the brother and the sister was not else than a desperate cry for help in order to gain my father’s attention’).

Since a real analogy expresses only partial similarity (in contrast to identification), and since in a non-literal simile also the ground is (re)interpreted in relation to the source or the target or both (Tartakovsky et al. 2019: 187), the expressions of identification were not relevant in the study. This was the reason why the constructions of essive-formal case were filtered out from the data. Bare comparisons were also removed since they express the identity of two entities/scenes based on a particular property, e.g. (8–10).

- (8) He [Ferenc] desired this metamorphosis as others desire the state of drunkenness or opium
- (9) he [Angelo] was attached to it [his prepared crocodile] as others to their favourite dog
- (10) the minerals tell the same story as the horrible and wonderful fate of Isis and Osiris

The last set of expressions left out from the data were constructions with the conjunction *mintha* (‘as if’): these expressions are in a greater epistemic distance from the act of comparison, insofar as they do not claim the analogy of two entities, rather they express its possibility. On the other hand, the use of *mintha* represents doubt in the process of construal; in a further investigation it will be worth comparing the proportion and distribution of the expressions of *mintha* to the expressions of *mint* with the aim of shedding some light to the dynamic process of (re)construing and representing the events, but the present paper does not discuss this issue.

As a result of the manual filtering, I obtained 233 similitudes. The next phase of filtering was a semantic categorization. I divided the whole sample into three groups according to the type of comparison. The first group includes those similes which are connected to perceptions, impressions, like (11–13).

- (11) [The thoughts of Ferenc] swam in the air one by one like the bands of sentences coming from the characters’ mouth in illustrations
- (12) The man who I had known before remained in the skin, which now hung from the flesh as a wet blanket
- (13) His [Born’s] lungs [...] hardly took any air whistling and rattling like an old iron stove

There is great variability in this group of perceptual expressions. They do, however, have in common that the source of the analogy as well as its ground is based on previous visual (or audial) impression and felt quality. Thus, they do not initiate the reinterpretation of the ground or the source in relation to the target. I categorized 40 expressions altogether as expressions of perceptual resemblance. In the novel, they function first and foremost in describing the process of the preparation of the body of Angelo (one of the protagonists) and the symptoms of cholera. Both targets are considered specific experiences from the perspective of an 18<sup>th</sup> century woman narrator, thus they can be represented only through expressing a resemblance to

everyday entities or scenes. Since the focus of the analysis is on non-literal similes of the novel, the members of the first group were removed from the sample.<sup>13</sup>

The second group comprises examples, i.e. similes in which the source is related to a famous character of historical or cultural traditions (14–15).

- (14) [Angelo] asked also the assistants not to allow him to the near of the door, if they would perceive that he had got cold feet, like Odysseus when he had himself fastened to the mast of his sheep being eager to hear the song of the sirens
- (15) we lived here once as Goethe had lived in Weimar, as Gessner had lived in Zurich, as Cicero had lived in Tusculanum and as Horace had lived at the foot of Soracte

18 examples (or illustrations) were separated and omitted from the sample in total.<sup>14</sup> Some of them are mixed with literal resemblances (e.g. *Only the white of the eye of her [Zsuzsanna Bossányi] was visible as the eye of the mad Lady Macbeth in engravings*) forming a transition between the two categories (mentioning a famous character but also creating a ground of impression). These were categorized as parallels, belonging to the first group above.

The third group contains non-literal similes selected for closer analysis. After a precise filtering, 175 expressions were classified as non-literal similes altogether: these data made up the whole sample for the investigation. In the close analysis, the key aspect was the conceptual accessibility of the source and the target (i.e. the principle of directionality and the deviations from it). The following section goes into the details of the results.

#### 4. Similes as the pitfalls of cognition: results and discussion

##### 4.1. Clashing similes in the novel – the cases of incompatibility

In this study, I make an attempt to explore the rich and complex pattern of non-literal similes in a contemporary Hungarian novel avoiding any binary classification. I formed numerous categories between the opposite extremes (COS and CLS) on a scale extending from the different ways and degrees of elaborating the source and from its metaphorical or metonymic construal to the better accessibility of the topic (the target of the simile). As a consequence of focusing on scalarity rather than dichotomy, only those expressions were tagged as CLS in which the directionality principle proved to be inaccurate. Since creating an analogy through clashing similes is the most radical (and perhaps the most figurative) way of comparing two entities, I put a special emphasis on the members of CLS at first in order to tackle the idea of incompatibility.

- (16) [the plants at Széphalom] produced runted shoots with miniature leaves like stubble growing on a corpse

<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there are several similes of this type in the novel which initiate the reinterpretation of the ground (e.g. *living in a world which is as colourful as the windows of the Stephansdom* – in this case the ground of COLOURFULNESS can be interpreted as physical attribute and as abstract variability as well). When comprehending a simile required more than one interpretation of the ground, it was accepted as similitude.

<sup>14</sup> Only those illustrations were accepted as non-literal similes in which the ground offers more than one interpretation as in the following example: *I will struggle in this place like the half-mad elephant of Schönbrunn, who in the end only watches the opportunity to take revenge on one of the unguarded children*. In this expression it is the ground of the animal behaviour which is reinterpreted as human attitude in order to form an analogy between the two situations.

In (16) the source of the simile is an uncommon experience: the reader presumably does not know much about the physiology of cadavers (except if s/he has a special profession). Moreover, the linguistic structure of the source, the participle with *-ing* form profiles the process implicating the direct observation of the biological changes of a body after its death.

Example (17) shows a different kind of incompatibility: the abstract and underspecified source (*the beginning of something*) makes the simile clashing, and it requires more mental effort in comprehension than other partly compatible conceptualizations.

- (17) it [the process of building the new house] was fresh and full of hope like the beginning of something

There is little difference between an underspecified source and those similes in which it is an imagined or a mythical entity (as *manna* in 18).

- (18) the peasants bought them [amulets and fragrant fractions] of course like they would be manna

There are similes among those which use mythical entities or creatures as the source, in which the target is mentally more accessible than the source thanks to direct observation. Thus, in e.g. (19) more than one factor make the simile clashing (the appearance of a legendary creature and the better accessibility of the target which is Angelo's figure in the moonshine).

- (19) In the moonshine, he [Angelo] was really like the vagarious elves of tales

In addition, there are similes in the narration in which the complex target is compared to an entity being impossible according to our everyday knowledge. (The simile in (20) is cited by Sophie from her father's alchemistic explanation.)

- (20) mercury is a mixture of cold air and heat. Like something which is woman and man at the same time.

The source of the simile does not exist regarding the physiology of a human body; therefore, the expression initiates the reinterpretation of the quality of mixedness.

A simile can be considered especially clashing when the narrator herself declares the (partly) unknown nature of the source (21–22).

- (21) the cadaver laid on the centre of the stage like the protagonist in an unknown Greek tragedy

- (22) inserting my palm into his [Angelo's] hand made me feel like putting my hand through a fist-sized hole into an unknown box, from which I'd heard an odd noise. Like putting my hand into muddy water which is full of unknown life.

Finally, there can be colloquial expressions in similes that cause remarkable incompatibility. In (23) an idiom in Hungarian<sup>15</sup> occurs *mint akit elevenen nyúznak* 'like who is skinned alive'

<sup>15</sup> In the Hungarian National Corpus (MNSz2, v. 2.0.5, [http://clara.nytud.hu/mnsz2-dev/bonito/run.cgi/first\\_form](http://clara.nytud.hu/mnsz2-dev/bonito/run.cgi/first_form)) the word form *nyúz-nak* skin-3PL has 120 occurrences, 19 of them (15.83%) belong to the construction *mint aki-t*

expressing a hyperbolic feeling of being analysed or investigated thoroughly with anger or aggression.

(23) He [Angelo] felt himself [during portraying] like being skinned alive

The simile compares the subjective emotions arising from being portrayed to non-accessible experiences in everyday life. On the one hand, knowing the idiom makes the reader familiar with the linguistic expression; on the other hand, however, the conceptual organization defamiliarizes the meaning of the simile because of representing an unprecedented field of experience as the source of the comparison.

#### 4.2. Function and proportion of simile categories in the narration

From the examples above it can be concluded that the narration in the novel develops the following strategy in representing the text world: it creates the illusion of familiarity through similes in the reader, but then it alienates her from the world of the discourse because of the incompatibility of the source and the target. A simile can raise the reader's expectation that the actual topic of the discourse will be elucidated expressively through analogy. However, it is not fulfilled by a clashing or a more or less non-compatible simile since the vehicle, the source of the comparison is proved to be hardly accessible or unknown. Moreover, a CLS can lead the reader in the domain of impossibility, mysticism or estrangement from the common experiences of the human body. Using CLSs and other deviations from a compatible simile can be considered an essential **strategy of representation** in the novel as evidenced by the proportions of simile types in the investigated sample.

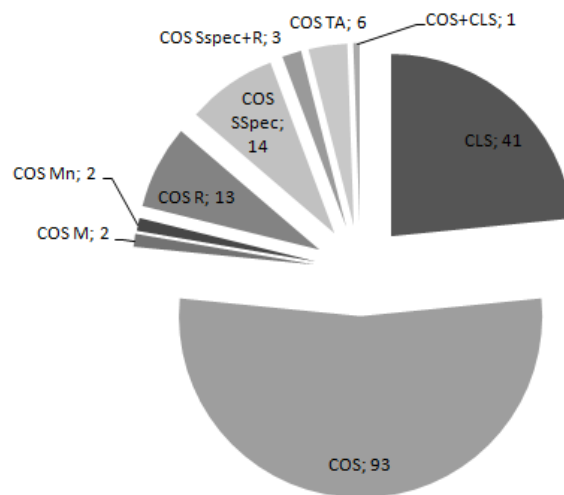


Figure 2. The distribution of simile types in the novel

*nyúznak* like who-ACC skin-3PL 'like who is skinned'. There is one data of the expression *mint aki-t él-ve nyúznak* like who-ACC live-PTCP.ADV skin-3PL 'like who is skinned alive'. The other form of verb with verbal prefix (or coverb, see Rounds 2001: 65–81) *meg-nyúznak* PRFX-skin-3PL has 28 occurrences in the corpus, 3 of them have the adverbial modifier *elevenen* 'alive'. Though these data do not demonstrate obviously the idiom-like nature of the expression, but it is worth mentioning that the strongest collocate of the word form *megnyúznak* is the *elevenen* adverbial modifier (with 5.969 logDice measure). Thus, though the expression occurs in usage with more than one version, there are evidences of its idiomacy.

There is a total of 41 CLS-similes in the novel, hence this type runs to almost one-quarter of the sample (23%). And if this proportion is compared to the number of other types of COS-similes, it becomes clear that compatible expressions occur only twice more often than non-compatible ones.

The pattern can be detailed further taking the categories of non-compatible similes into thorough consideration. Source specificity (COS SSpec) dominates the sample in this respect (8%). The group can be characterized by a source of scientific phenomena (diseases, geological, physical and chemical processes), exotic creatures (*like a tropic bird*), or unusual situations (being like an embryo in the womb, eating disgusting but elegant and exclusive dishes). They cannot be separated rigidly from CLS-data in the analysis; nevertheless, the elaboratedness of the source, as well as the specific but not unknown domain of knowledge in the source can help to identify the instances of the subcategory.

The second most frequent subtype of COS-similes is COS R. It compares the target of the expression to situations in everyday life and/or to one of the typical social roles/positions in them, with an additional act of perspectivization. From 13 occurrences in total (7,4%) there are 6 in which the behaviour of a character has its analogy with a childish role (playing a game or perpetrating some bad acts). In 4 expressions the role in the source belongs to the realm of arts (the source represents e.g. an actor, an author or a knife-thrower), but there are similes with less familiar situations as their source too (for example the role of an explorer staying in the prow, or the perspective of animals having a presentiment of an earthquake).

There is no rigid boundary between COS R and COS SSpec.<sup>16</sup> The similes relating to a specific role, however, can be placed closer to COS on the scale: though they represent the target of the simile from an uncommon perspective, the situations themselves in which the perspective can be processed are not totally unfamiliar in more than half of the expressions.

Another extension of the conventional schema of compatible simile can be described as the emergence of a conceptual asymmetry between the components in favour of the target: instead of explicating the source or the ground of the simile in details, the expressions of COS TA category (which run to 3,4% of the whole sample) elaborate the target, the actual topic of the discourse as a scene that is directly observable by the narrator and the reader, e.g. [the wings of the butterfly] *came together with the scale in the corner of the tissue paper* [like ashes].

There are instances of the category in which the target is related to the subjective state of mind of the narrator or a character's consciousness represented by the narrator; consequently, the active perspective of conceptualization belongs to the target component of the simile (and hence it can be accessed directly in the process of reading).

For example, the father of the narrator explains a situation to his daughter as follows: *[t]his is the reason why you always feel yourself like someone who has lost her way*. Beside the underspecified nature of the source (i.e. where, in which domain has lost someone her way?) one can notice the explication of mental content in the target: it is the feeling of the narrator (attributed to her by her father) emerging as a felt quality in the course of the narration. Since the target of the simile is more accessible in the process of reading than its source, the

<sup>16</sup> Three similes occur in the text which can be labelled with both of the subcategories: in the first one the way one of the protagonists feels is compared to the emotions of a recently painted and framed oil painting; the second creates an analogy between the relationship of the two protagonists and the rivalry of a sparrow and a bird of paradise; in the third one the narrator regards herself as a barbarian in the company of her husband, Ferenc. In these cases, the reader not only construes a specific and detailed source for processing the simile but also s/he takes one of the perspectives of the source situation. Therefore, these data amalgamate the properties of the two simile types.

expression rearranges the conceptual path of the figure and its foreground–background alignment, keeping the target in the foreground of the reader’s attention.

The last categories of non-compatible similes are realized by metaphorical or metonymic sources; their proportion in sum is slightly more than 2%. One example of the former is that Ferenc’s brother rolled him [Ferenc, with his words] up into spittly threads like a spider. In this expression both the entity in the source domain (the spider) and the ground (the activity of the spider) have to be interpreted metaphorically (with the conceptual metaphors an intriquer is a spider and intriguing is spinning a net in the background).

For the other category, the following expression counts as a metonymic simile: Ferenc considers his child as being in control of words as his books. The conceptual metonymies word stands for language, or – more accurately – word stands for the act of using language motivate the meaning of the expression.

Beside CLS-similes, presumably these data require the most mental effort of conceptualization from the reader, as s/he has to process not only an analogy but also a metonymic shift from a source concept to a target or metaphorical mappings between the source domain and the target domain – within the source of a simile or relating it to the ground.

Summarizing the proportions of the subcategories, the pattern of similes in the novel can be described as follows: besides the total of 93 compatible similes (53%) the narration includes 82 similes (they account for 47% of the sample) which extend one or another way from the COS schema, and half of non-compatible similes belong to the CLS category.

Relying on the qualitative and quantitative analyses I argue that similes function as pitfalls of cognition in the process of reading. One can disregard them because of their conventional linguistic structure and their mixing with other types of comparison (literal resemblances, illustrations, and examples). Sophie’s similes give the impression that the narrator wants to understand the world around her, but she does not have the linguistic repertoire rich and subtle enough to represent the complexity of the events authentically. Therefore, she creates analogical conceptualizations and expresses them with the figure of simile in order to get closer to her experiences and on the other hand to the exceptional events happening in the life of her husband (Ferenc) and his friend (Angelo).

However, the reader can have a different kind of experience: the majority of the similes counts as pseudo-analogy or non-literal resemblance, rendering it more difficult to construe imaginatively the world of the text. Hence, they alienate the reader from the narrated events. The (more or less) non-compatible similes confuse the reader in forming a coherent representation of the plot, for the source conceptualizations of the similes as analogies remain unelaborated, unknown, hardly or non-accessible. Initiating a now prominent, then backgrounded process of comparisons, as well as forming the analysed pattern of similes can be regarded as an act (and the product) of language generation: it results in a particular coding system that departs from the conventions of meaning creation through resemblances. And it seems to be the narrator’s reflection on her own experiences: this strategy symbolizes on a metalevel of linguistic behaviour that unusual events can be represented only by non-conventional coding.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, I investigated the figures of simile in the narration of a contemporary Hungarian novel *Kitömött barbár* (The Stuffed Barbarian). The qualitative and quantitative analysis dwelled on the key aspects of examining the conceptual organization of similes; their amount



and distribution in the text of the novel; their types and subcategories according to the principle of conceptual directionality; finally, their function in cognition and narration.

The study argues that similes facilitate and hinder the process of reading at the same time since they provide the familiar structure of an analogy, but they also extend the conceptualization in non-compatible ways as well as modify the conceptual path and direction of the configuration in a significant proportion. Therefore, similes can function as the pitfalls of cognition.

In order to gain empirical evidence for the central assumption of the study, a corpus-based methodology was adopted focusing on the conceptual schema of compatible similes and its extensions. The directionality principle claims that the source of a simile tends to be concrete and conceptually accessible whereas the target of the figure is more abstract and less accessible. The expressions realizing the principle count as compatible similes (COS), as opposed to clashing similes (CLS) which contradict the idea of conventional conceptual organization. There are relevant categories of non-compatibility between the two extremes on a scale.

The results of analysing the novel as a corpus demonstrate that the extensions of conventional simile have almost the same frequency in the text as COSs. Consequently, one of the main strategies of the narration is to modify the process of construing analogical meaning expected by the reader: Sophie's narrative work reverses the direction of comprehending an analogy, or at least it makes the process vague and unstable. Since non-compatible instantiations are mixed with conventional similes in the text, and since there are other, less sophisticated ways of expressing resemblance in the novel (parallels and examples), Sophie's verbal activity is both fluent and complex.

Moreover, similes represent an attitude towards the narrated events: the narration provides only the minimal level of conceptual availability of the topics of the discourse from time to time. In other words, the reader can have the impression that despite the analogies s/he cannot become familiar enough with the world of the text. This is the poeticization of the experience of strangeness and estrangement at the level of the texture. Thus, the pattern of compatible and non-compatible similes symbolizes the central theme of the novel in the formation of the text.

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