

A figure is a figure is a figure

Eight Axioms Toward a RhetFig Manifesto

Kyle Gerber, Danielle Bisnar Griffin, Katherine Tu, and Randy Allen Harris
RhetFig Research Group

The RhetFig Project at the University of Waterloo is developing a formal ontology of rhetorical figures for use in computationally augmented rhetorical and linguistic analysis. At RhetFig, we maintain that figuration is universal because it reflects the processing affinities of our mindbrains; in this way RhetFig bridges the computational study of language, cognitive science, and the rhetorical tradition.

1. Figures have neurocognitive basis Rhetorical figures are particular configurations of linguistic units which reflect and appeal to our neurocognitive affinities	
2. Figures are pervasive Figures are not specialty devices for poetry and rap music. They are everywhere in language; both tropes <i>and</i> schemes.	
3. Figures are form/function pairings All figures have argumentative, communicative, or pragmatic functions: form is not arbitrary.	
4. Form-function leverages iconicity One of the most common ways we find meaning is through resemblance, and iconicity is the phenomenon where by the form resembles the content. Figures leverage iconicity in different ways.	
5. No figure is an island Figures interact with each other and with other linguistic features (phonological structure, word class, syntactic conventions); figural-linguistic bundles have composite and even Gestalt functions.	
6. Figures are polyfunctional and polypathotic The same form can serve multiple functions and the same function can be served by multiple forms. Polyfunctionality is not just for a given figure, but also for figure collocations, in concert with linguistic features.	
7. Figures are atomic and molecular Figures have their own unique signatures and they occur elementally. They collocate into arrangements and colligate, bonding tightly into new compound figures.	
8. A figure is a figure is a figure Figures have specific signatures; if the signature is present, the figure is present. Given figural instances might have high resonance, because of their particular leverage of neurocognitive affinities, or low resonance, because of entrenchment, competition with other factors, and so on. But a figure is a figure is a figure.	



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of English
Language and Literature



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Glossary

Anadiplosis

The repetition of the last word or word group of a phrase or clause at the beginning of the subsequent phrase or clause.

Antimetabole

Reverse repetition of at least two words or word groups.

Aposiopesis

To halt suddenly, unexpectedly, after starting to say something.

Climax

A compound figure of gradatio and a crementum, such that an ascending or descending semantic sequence of words or phrases is linked through final/initial repetitions.

Crementum

A succession of words or word groups with a semantic cline.

Incrementum: Crementum with a semantic incline

Decrementum: Crementum with a semantic decline

Epanaphora

The repetition of a word or word group at the beginning of phrases or clauses.

Figure collocation

The co-occurrence of more than one rhetorical figure in the same linguistic units.

Figure colligation

The binding of rhetorical figures into a new figure.

Figural resonance

The attentional salience afforded to a figural instance; a figural instance that is highly identifiable has high figural resonance; a figure that is obscured due to competing figures or linguistic units leveraging interfering affinities has low figural resonance.

Formal assent

Kenneth Burke's term for the 'agreeability' of linguistic form, the way it plays to our neurocognitive affinities. Formal assent can sponsor conceptual assent; when the form is agreeable—that is, it activates stimulation of a neurocognitive affinity—we are primed to agree with its meaning as well.

Gradatio

A succession of anadiploses.

Isocolon

Two or more phrases or sentences with the same syllabic and prosodic structure, a form of parallelism.

Mesodiplosis

Repetition of the same word or word group in the middle of phrases or clauses.

Neurocognitive affinity

A mental disposition that shapes our perception and thought, familiar from such approaches as faculty psychology and Gestalt experimentation. They include proximity, repetition, similarity, correlation, and bounding.

Parison

Two or more proximal phrases or clauses with the same syntactic structure, a form of parallelism.

Rhetorical figure

Linguistic configurations, which reflect and appeal to our neurocognitive affinities.

Semantic homogeneity

A type of formal assent, effected when similarity of forms induces the perception of similarity or 'fittingness' of concepts, accomplished through such figures as rhyme, alliteration, isocolon, and parison.