

## ABSTRACT

### **The metaphorical mind. Abstraction as a cognitive-semantic and metaphorical process in the Anglo-Scottish Debate of the 18th Century.**

The semantic models developed in the Anglo-Scottish Eighteenth Century are characterized by the *Way of Ideas*, starting with John Locke. There are many internal revisions, such as those of Berkeley and Hume, which however - and not always justifiably so - underestimate the abstraction power of the human mind. The device of abstraction cannot, however, be confined to Berkeley and Hume's modes of analysis, however interesting they may be in several respects.

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* displays a rare theoretical flexibility: it offers cues to emphasize the relationship between ideas (mental content) and so-called 'mental acts'; a relationship that allows, on the one hand, not to exasperate the causal matrix of mental images and, therefore, of the cognitive processes that arise from them by resolving in the different ways of combining (or associating) ideas, and, on the other, to emphasize the activity principles of the human mind, without accentuating the mechanistic factors connected to visual processes defined according to the principles of Newtonian optics. These factors undoubtedly shed new light on Locke's theory of mind. The way Locke deals with the device of abstraction presents some interesting analogies with current theoretical models of the process of categorization (*prototypes*).

This is the premise for the next step: to show the intersection between the semantic process, which results in the genesis of general and flexible mental representations, and metaphorical processes. In this perspective, Thomas Reid's position is interesting. His notion of a *general conception* - present in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) - is no longer connected to the traditional notion of *mental image* and absorbs the new elements of Lockean representation by emphasizing its relational nature and the relationship between it and other representations. In this sense, Reid approaches the question of *metaphor*. The relational nature of representations and the multiform relations of similarity between representations are the theoretical cores that allow Reid to emphasize metaphorical representations. The stage is therefore set for a comprehensive theory of metaphor. Metaphor is not only to be understood as a rhetorical-stylistic device since it intervenes in normal cognitive processes. The metaphorical representation intercepts the semantic representation by completely re-shaping it and then giving rise to a metaphorical semantic representation that intervenes in both the processes of categorization and in the process of communication/understanding mediated by the use of language.

Abstraction thus falls within the domain of the metaphorical activity of the mind, of a mind that presents an evident social, pre-linguistic and linguistic structure: from this point of view, Reid's model differs from the Lockean model.

The metaphorical mind marks the crisis of the logical model and, partially, also of the psychological model which, although contextual to the paradigm of the naturalization of the human mind, nevertheless accentuates the device of combination/association.

In conclusion, the notion of the metaphorical mind puts a certain model of the human mind in "crisis" but becomes an indispensable resource for evaluating cognitive-linguistic activity in its entirety in a more comprehensive and effective way. Metaphor is an essentially cognitive device, ordinary and functional in the normal mental life of men, and open to various applications, including poetic-literary ones.

**Keywords:** Abstraction, Meaning, Metaphorical Representation