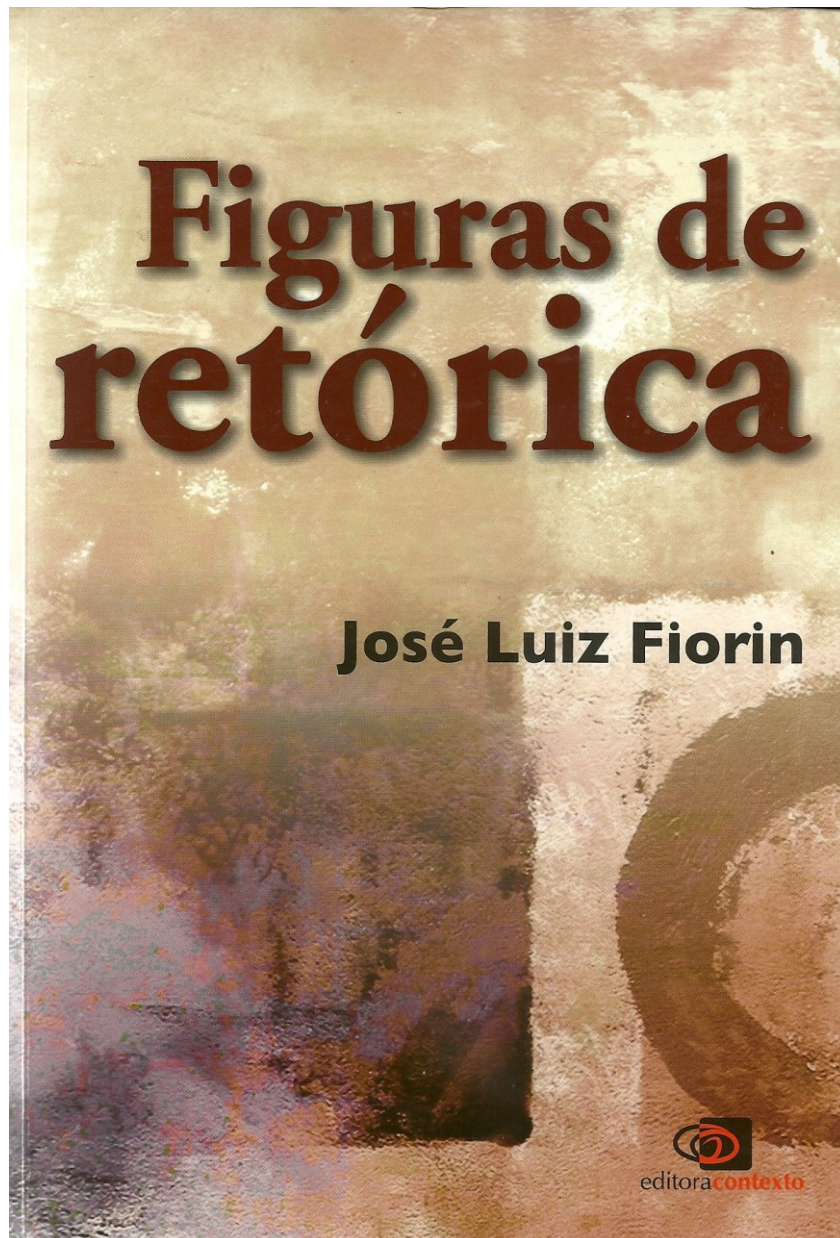


FIORIN, José Luiz. *Figuras de retórica* [Rhetoric Figures]. São Paulo: Contexto, 2014. 205 p.

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An argument is what stresses an idea; it is what brightens it.
José Luiz Fiorin

When dating his book's Foreword, Professor Fiorin writes the following in an unusual way: "São Paulo, in a hazy winter afternoon of 2013." His reference is to a gray weather day with little light and heavy winter mist. However, the *haze* figure, which many times get in the way of our look (and of our comprehension), can be properly evoked in *Figuras de retórica* [Rhetoric Figures]'s presentation. It is so, because it sheds light, clarifies and defines concepts, which were not always well understood, despite the fascination they have exerted on language scholars for more than two millennia. We state thus in advance: It is a book that was published in order to become a reference in the field.

The renowned and acknowledged linguist, José Luiz Fiorin professes an interest in rhetoric which is not new. To a wider audience than the academic, it suffices to recall his weekly contribution to the magazine *LÍNGUA Portuguesa* [Portuguese Language] since 2006, in a section that has been entitled just as the discipline – Rhetoric. However, I believe that it is his profound training as a linguist – a Saussure, Benveniste, Hjelmslev scholar ..., aside with his knowledge of literature, of Greek, of Latin, of Portuguese itself which make his last book *Figuras de retórica* [Rhetoric figures] so singular.

Fiorin warns that his work is not a catalogue of figures, but it is an introduction of meaning-making mechanisms, enunciative operations that intensify or mitigate discursive meanings "in order to persuade."¹ Despite that fact, a long list of more than a hundred rhetoric figures (some say that the ancient's "taxonomic rage" classified hundreds of them...) is presented to the reader. And, many times when defining and analyzing them, the author revisits the debate on rhetoric figures held by ancient, classical and contemporary authors, such as Cicero, Quintilian, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, Pierre Fontanier, Jakobson, Groupe μ...

The understanding of every figure and its discursive argumentativity is preceded by three initial chapters that provide readers with the work's grounds, presenting and analyzing the relations between linguistics and rhetoric accurately and, therefore, making the reader realize the tropological and argumentative dimensions of language,

¹ Extract translated from the Portuguese version: "a serviço da persuasão" (FIORIN, 2014, p.10).

both constituting its general rhetoricality. Every figure is addressed in, at least, one chapter (the argumentative operation mode of a metaphor, the “queen” of the figures, and of a metonymy was approached in more than one chapter). The fourth chapter gives the reader the organization employed by the author in order to present the figures. In fact, even though the book is a “reorganization of texts that were first published in the magazine *LÍNGUA Portuguesa* [Portuguese Language] by Segmento [Segment] publishing house ,” according to what is informed by the author in the Foreword, it, as a new whole, acquires new meanings and, undoubtedly, greater importance to language scholars.

We know that rhetoric studies are part of human culture for more than two thousand years. However, there were times when they were formed by four or five mechanisms of persuasive discourse construction – *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *actio* and *memoria* (sometimes *memoria* is not addressed) – which can be found at the Greek and Latin treatises, and, other times, they were restricted to some of the mechanisms, mainly to *elocutio*. This last mechanism and its interest in style only started being part of this discipline with Gorgias (c.485-380 B.C.). Briefly, Fiorin retraces the discipline’s path throughout the centuries, pointing to the periods in which its studies were restricted to figures and to a more recent period, when it was reconsidered as a whole, focusing on argumentation. What is more important, however, is not the historical recovery but his way of contextualizing it in relation to discursive studies, once this is the topic carried out in the entire book – i.e. the *discourse*.

We mainly emphasize this positioning because the revival of rhetoric in the twentieth century was firstly due to the philosophers’ (or jusphilosophers’) work, who were concerned with reasoning regarding ethics, moral and law; a milestone in the field is the well known *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, written by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in 1958. This compendium of argumentation does not exactly approach language processes; therefore, it evaded the scope of linguistics for some time. It regards what the authors have named “discursive techniques” of argumentation, which only later became a research source for linguists. However, Fiorin’s perspective is different: At a time when rhetoric studies present reasons for its decline, he shows us how “new discursive conditions” change our ways to look at them and, above all, how new conceptions of science, objectivity/neutrality and

communication models will make linguistics closer to the ancient discipline. Actually, he highlights that such proximity was also possible because the very object of linguistics, from Saussure to Benveniste, has been altered and enriched; a linguistic study that now goes beyond the phrase, reaching the text, the plan of expression of the *discourse*, warns Fiorin. It is from the “general rhetoricality in language” point of view that the author suggests that the discursive linguistics should inherit the rhetoric teachings; i.e., he advocates the use of its studies in order to understand what “disturbs the grammar of a language and the supposed logic of it,” the rhetoric field (p.23), and not a mere application of a doctrine established in ancient times.

The text revisits, then, the first works of the field that bring linguistics and rhetoric closer: The “famous text ‘Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances’ by Jakobson (1963, p.43-67)” (p.15) that regards metaphor and metonymy as symbolic processes of meaning-making in every language; following from that, the work of the Groupe μ , from 1974, which is an attempt to classify the figures from a more rigorous methodological perspective. Fiorin also presents how the famous *The Old Rhetoric: an Aide-Mémoire*, written by Roland Barthes and published in 1970 in the journal *Communications*, rekindles the linguists’ interest in rhetoric.

We would like to stress the explanation that the author gives in the second chapter of the initial meaning of *ornatus* in Latin and how it must be understood in rhetoric: “well-argued,” “well equipped to perform its function,” and of the word *argument* itself, which its Greek root *argu-* means “to bright, shine.” And we must highlight the author’s key-positioning regarding rhetoric figures: “there is no gap between argumentation and figures once the last always plays an argumentative role” (p.27). At this point, Professor Fiorin is talking to those who consider it an “ornament,” a language embellishment or a way of expression that is far from “natural.” He also dialogues with Perelman and Tyteca’s positioning, who, in the *Treatise*, distinguish argumentative figures from style figures, claiming that only figures that lead the reader to a “perspective change,” due to its new use, are argumentative. When it does not occur, “the figure will be considered an embellishment, a figure of style. It can excite admiration, but this will be on the aesthetic plane, or in recognition of the speaker’s originality” (*The New Rhetoric [La nouvelle rhétorique]. A Treatise on Argumentation*. Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1969, p.169). Others, such as Olivier Reboul, consider that,

besides persuasive “rhetoric figures,” there are those which are not rhetorical such as poetical, humorous (*Introdução à retórica*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, p.113). Fiorin’s work contextualizes the study of figures from an ancient rhetoric view but, in the present, he joins them – *all of them*, to discursive studies, as enunciative mechanisms which produce *argumentative* meaning effects.

As it can be noted, those first chapters are essential to enable understanding and a deeper level of comprehension of the work as a whole. In the third chapter, we get in touch with the most recent authors of the field, such as Ricouer, Greimas & Courtès, Denis Bertrand, who offer a theoretical-methodological framework that supports the author in his explanation of the figures and their function in discourse: To *accentuate* or to *deemphasize* a certain meaning of a utterance. Without any doubts, text clarity is a common virtue of Professor’s texts; and in this work, in particular, its didactic (but not oversimplifying) aspect is another quality. Thus, concepts as intensity-extensity in linguistic extent, speed up-slow down, elasticity-condensation, among others, are understood by, above all, the argumentative examples given, a feature mastered by the author. Let’s take a look in a short extract of the third chapter. Revisiting Ricoueur and Benveniste, he states the following:

[...] rhetoric is the discipline of meaning misplacement. Let us illustrate it. When Machado de Assis says ‘man is a thinking erratum,’² in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*’ chapter XXXVII, it is only by noting that there is a misplacement in considering man a erratum that the metaphor is learned, once the word erratum refers to printing error. However, this misplaced preaching establishes a tension between identity (error correction, development) and difference (in each edition/in each stage of life) and, this way, it acquires placement (p.28-9).³

In the classification of figures that are addressed throughout the book, the author relies on the ancients’ organization, dividing them according to the occurrence of (1)

² Translator’s Note.: In the English version of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* published by Oxford University Press in 1997 and translated by Gregory Rabassa, the expression “o homem é uma errata pensante” is translated to English as “man is a thinking reed,” which we opted not to use in order to not interfere in the professor’s analysis of the metaphor used in Portuguese.

³ In the Portuguese version: ... *a retórica é a disciplina da impropriedade do sentido. Exemplifiquemos isso. Quando se diz, no capítulo XXXVII de Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas, de Machado de Assis, que ‘o homem é uma errata pensante’, apreende-se a metáfora, quando se observa que há uma não pertinência em considerar que o homem é uma errata. Afinal, errata se usa para escritos. No entanto, essa predicação impertinente estabelece uma tensão entre identidade (correção de erros, aprimoramento) e diferença (em cada edição/em cada estágio da vida) e, assim, ganha pertinência Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 9 (1): 189-195, Jan./Jul. 2014.

addition or repetition, which increases the utterance; (2) omission that reduces an utterance; (3) transposition of linguistic elements, i.e., the arrangement change of linguistic elements in an utterance and (4) a shift or an exchange of elements. “Actually, tropes perform a semantic concentration movement, which is characteristic of metaphors, or semantic broadening, which is a property of metonymies” (p.31, our translation). Each figure is not only formally defined, but it is done in a way that really enables the reader to verify how the argumentative meaning effects are discursively produced. In order to do so, figures are always extensively exemplified and contextualized: He never shows only the line where they are, but the entire fragment in which they occur, thus, enabling the reader to minimally situate them in their context.

The generous set of examples is surely one of the rich aspects of the work. The referred books revisit lusophone as a whole, in time and space, and in different genres: From Brazil, Portugal, Angola ... From the classic ones (Camões, Vieira, Machado) to the modern and contemporary ones (João de Cabral de Melo Neto, Graciliano Ramos, Fernando Pessoa, Guimarães Rosa, José Paulo Paes, Ondjaki, José Eduardo Agualusa...); From writers from the 18th and 19th centuries (Dom Francisco de Vasconcelos Coutinho, Alencar, Castro Alves, Garret, Eça de Queirós...) to songwriters (Chico Buarque, João Bosco e Aldir Blanc, Paulo Soledade e Marino Pinto...). The list is long. There is also the journalistic discourse, which is illustrated with the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* – the example of weather information published on the day after A1-5 [Institutional Act Number Five] decree is a must read, with the magazine *Veja*, with the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*... We also always find his care for exemplification in languages other than verbal, because, as the Professor says, “if semiotics, which aims to be a general theory of meaning-making, seeks to look back on rhetoric, to inherit it, it must regard language in general” (p.30, our translation). And, at this point, we miss the use of illustration, because the visual examples are only described. Finally, the book presents an Index, which helps the reader to find any figure of his/her interest, and a Reference that regards every work of ancient, classic and new rhetoric, of linguistics, of semiotics, of pragmatics and of grammar.

Two issues close these notes. First, we were actually lacking a work of this kind. Nowadays we only find a small taste of figures in short lists, sometimes at the end of some grammar books, sometimes in works dealing with legal language, sometimes in

works regarding rhetoric, or in textbooks. Specific works about this issue (some were published in the '80s) [in Brazil], besides the fact of their being out of print, undertake neither the discursive perspective nor the theoretical depth found in *Figuras de retórica* [Rhetoric Figures].

To conclude, I would like to revisit one of Fiorin's statement in his Preface, because to me it precisely shows the book wide relevance, once figures are part of a whole rhetoric complex that we inherit from the ancient: The "rhetoric was an adventure of the human spirit to understand the means which enables the enunciator to perform his/her persuasive task during the development of democracy, when dissension and persuasion were essential" (p.11, our translation). This issue has to do with the understanding of what meanings are produced, who produce them, how they are produced, to whom they are produced, what is aimed... And this is the relevance and "utility" of this work: To show how to understand the language/languages that permeate(s) our everyday activity in a democratic society with the (idealistic?) possibility to, in the Professor's word, "make humankind more human."

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