

# Smells Like Simile: Olfactory Expressions and their Figurative Potential in the Bosnian Language

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes expressions that use the olfactory domain as a figurative source in the Bosnian language. Authentic texts retrieved from the *Sketch Engine* web application were used as the corpus for the study. The web corpus includes blogs, news portals, and other web pages that use olfactory expressions either in the main text or in the respective comment sections. Two basic smell expressions were found to have the greatest figurative potential and therefore examined in this study. The results of the two basic smell expressions indicate that they are mainly used figuratively with simile being the main focus. Another finding is that olfactory expressions are used for anticipatory purposes.

**Key words:** olfactory language, simile, olfaction, Bosnian language, figurative language

## Introduction

A 2012 McCann Worldgroup survey of 7,000 young people aged 16 to 30 around the world found that about 50% prefer (phones or laptops) to over their sense of smell. Another study found that vision words are 1,768 times more common than smell-related words in the English language (Lynott, Connell, Brysbaert, Brand, Carney 2019, cited in Majid 2021). The same study found that in a test of around 40,000 English words representing adult vocabulary, 74% of the words were visual and less than 1% were olfactory (Majid, 2021: 113).

This short preview suggests that olfaction is indeed underrepresented as a domain. The fact that any study of smell-related terms necessarily means a comparison with other perceptual modalities, most notably (color) vision (Meiser, 2015), further illustrates the position of olfaction. Vision, in particular, is a well-known source domain for the expression of concepts of knowledge or understanding (O'Meara and Majid, 2020: 367). Cognitive science and neuroscience have supposed that the perceptual world of the individual is dominated by vision, closely followed by hearing, and that olfaction is merely vestigial (Burenhult and Majid, 2011). San Roque et al. (2015) found that among 13 languages, verbs of sight are actually the most common (12 out of 13 languages) (Figure 1).

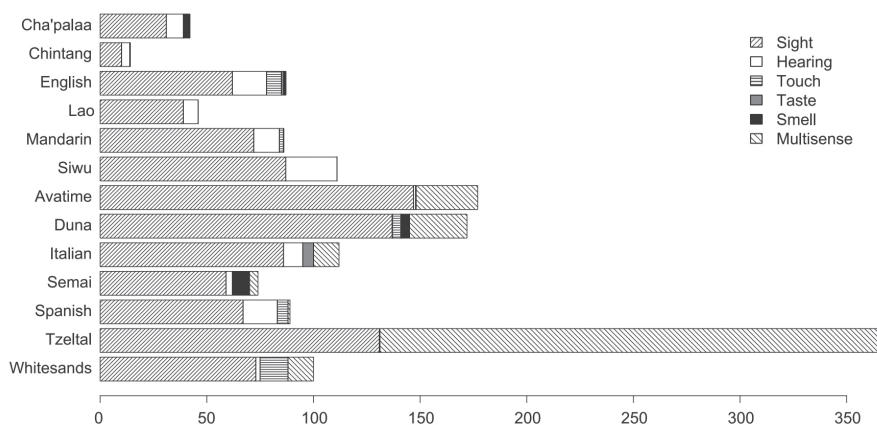


Figure 1 – Frequency of perception verbs by sense modality according to San Roque et al. (2015)

On the other hand, the human olfactory faculty can distinguish between 5000 and 1029 different olfactory percepts (Majid, 2021: 112). Considering the above, it seems that olfaction, as one of the “chemical senses” (Winter, 2016), is severely underrepresented in language. Winter et al. (2018) confirmed this imbalance in a thorough study of English corpora. They found that sight-based words are the most represented in all parts of speech.

One reason for the discrepancy between human olfactory ability and its representation in language is *ineffability* – the difficulty or

impossibility of putting certain experiences/concepts/phenomena into words (Levinson and Majid, 2014).<sup>1</sup> What may be effable in one language/culture is ineffable in another. Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) compared metaphorical (figurative) extensions of the olfactory domain in three languages – English, Spanish, and Basque – and proposed a process of “property selection” that identifies the properties borrowed from the source domain and explains how they are mapped onto the target domain. In terms of linguistic codability, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (ibid.) found that the figurative meaning extensions of olfaction are almost evenly distributed in the three languages she studied.

The indigenous Pirahã people of the Amazon in Brazil have no numbers or words for counting or quantification, and no color words (Everett, 2005). Although the Pirahã language is a relatively extreme example of ineffability (compared to English), the concept also exists in Germanic languages, for example. The German word *Backpfeifengesicht* stands for a concept that is hardly translated in monolexemic form in any of the other European languages. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, it can be argued that there is a concept, for *Backpfeifengesicht* in other languages (or cultures) as well, based on repeated perception, only these languages have not “followed through” with a tangible word form for it. Olfactory perceptions go through the same process. Although speakers of English have all the prerequisites in the world to perceive the same smell as, say, a Seri speaker, there is simply no lexical form for it. The truth may lie in need-driven language use, as Winter et al. (2018) note. The communicative needs of the Pirahã people gathered around the Maici River may require more olfactory expressions because they are hunters-gatherers and the discrimination of odors in nature is of greater value to them than, for example, to a Western European citizen living in an urban area.

One of the most important approaches to explaining an olfactory vocabulary is the formation of basic smell words. They are monolexemic,

<sup>1</sup> Kövecses (2019) uses the term “linguistic codability” to not only indicate the ability of one language to capture and emotion/phenomenon/entity/experience into lexical form but also show the degree of conceptual complexity and how it is portrayed in the word itself.

not source descriptors nor restricted to a narrow class of objects, and psychologically salient (Berlin and Kay, 1969, cited in Majid, 2021: 112). They do not refer to a source and can be used widely across objects (Majid, *ibid*). The spectrum of claims about the sense of smell ranges from the improbability that there are more than two or three basic smell terms words (Plank 2001, *Das grammatische Raritätenkabinett*, University of Konstanz, cited in Wnuk et al., 2020) to outright denial (“[t]here is no such thing as ‘basic smell terms’”, Holz, 2007: 186). In contrast to the latter, recent research suggests otherwise (Majid, 2021a; Majid, 2021b; Wnuk et al, 2020; Burenhult and Majid, 2011). There is converging evidence from lexicon, grammar, discourse, and psycholinguistic experimental studies that together point to the same conclusion – the language faculty is amply equipped to express our experience of smell. It is a matter of speaking the right language (Majid, 2021b: 421).

“The right language” from the above quote implies that most studies on olfaction (and perhaps other topics) focus on “major” languages such as English, and that olfactory language is of great value in cultures/languages outside the regular framework. Therefore, studies in other “less-er-described” languages are of true value in expanding the picture of olfaction and lexicalization.

### “Lesser-described” languages

The emerging cross-cultural data suggest a radical rethinking of the generalizability of the claim that there is no olfactory language (Majid, 2021: 113). Studies of olfactory perceptual are ostensibly English-centered. There is growing evidence that the semantic categories found in English are far from representative of the world’s languages (Majid and Burenhult, 2014: 267). Some of the languages are mentioned in the work of San Roque et al. (see Figure 1). Other significant studies provide detailed olfactory descriptions of Seri spoken in two villages in the Mexican Northwest (O’Meara and Majid, 2020), and Aslian-speaking communities (Austroasiatic, Malay Peninsula) (Burenhult and Majid, 2011), to name a few. The “less-er-described” languages mentioned above (as they are called in O’Meara and Majid’s work) have relatively

small numbers of native speakers compared to English – Seri only 900 (O’Meara and Majid, 2020), Jahai just over a thousand (Burenhult, 2005), about 17,000 of Siwu (Kpodo, 2013). However, “lesser-described” does not necessarily mean that there are few native speakers. For example, Mandarin has the most native speakers in the world, accounting for 12.1% of the world’s population (Lewis et al. 2015, cited in Chen, Wee, Tong, Ma, and Li, 2016). English, by comparison, is much more widely spoken, being (one of) the official languages in over 50 countries.<sup>2</sup> There is a perception that olfactory vocabulary is more prevalent in small languages and small, non-industrialized societies, according to previous research (Wnuk et al., 2020). The Wnuk et al. study of Thai, the largest of the Tai language family, with more than 55 million native speakers, shows otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

## Olfactory research in the Bosnian Language

On a global level, the Bosnian language can certainly be considered a less-described language. According to the 2013 census in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are about 1.9 million native speakers of Bosnian who also live in the country. This South Slavic language is one of the official languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the other two mutually intelligible languages, Croatian and Serbian. A more accurate representation, then, would be that in addition to the people who claim Bosnian as their mother tongue, the language is understood by millions of others.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/09/03/is-english-better-than-other-languages/> (retrieved September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

<sup>3</sup> The number of Tai speakers is estimated at 80 million. Of these, about 55 million are in Thailand, some 18 million in China, and about 7 million in Laos, northern Vietnam, and Myanmar (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tai-languages> retrieved September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Bosniak minorities of Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Kosovo call Bosnian their mother tongue (Hodžić, 2018). There are several hundred thousand speakers of Bosnian in Turkey due to immigrations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. More than a million Bosnian natives are spread across the world, mostly in Western Europe, Scandinavia, but also North America, Canada, and Australia. Furthermore, Bosnian is also present in the Middle East, especially with Bosniaks who immigrated to Palestine, Egypt, and the Arab Peninsula (Kalajdžija, 2019).

Among the sparse sources of Bosnian olfactory studies, Hadžizukić's 2015 study of olfactory elements in the works of poet Aleksa Šantić from Mostar and a book of poetry entitled "Kad vrijeme zamiriše" (Eng: When Time Scented the Air) by Nusret Omerika (2017) were the only available works. Interestingly, Hadžizukić (ibid.) found that 110 of Šantić's 597 poems use the olfactory domain with a total of 12 olfactory terms. Both books agree that poetic discourse is a vehicle for memories, emotions, and traumas reflected through perceptual modalities, with the sense of smell occupying an important position (Hadžizukić, 2015: 46). Since smells were used in the poems to refer to the entity that carries them (usually flowers) and to use the symbolic meaning of the entities, they are not candidates for basic smell words.

## Method

The aim of this paper was to investigate the figurative potential of two olfactory expressions in the Bosnian language. The corpus studied includes blog posts and comment sections from various websites. Sketch Engine's word sketch function was used to study Bosnia Web (bsWaC 1.2) (<https://app.sketchengine.eu/>), a web corpus created by Tomaž Erjavec and Nikola Ljubešić that contains 3,148,685 unique word forms including non-words.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, the thesaurus feature was used to find words associated with the noun *miris* (English: smell), which is expected to be the most salient member of the smell vocabulary. Among 1,000 related words, only the word (noun) *smrad* (English: stench) was identified as a potential basic smell word. Both *miris* and *smrad* met the criterion of randomness, i.e., they do not denote or refer to a concrete entity. The thesaurus procedure was also performed for *smrad* and revealed yielding no basic smell word candidates out of 93 *smrad*-related words. This result is consistent with the initial assumption that there

<sup>5</sup> Non-words (also spelt nonwords) are tokens which do not start with a letter of the alphabet. Examples of non-words are numbers, punctuation but also tokens such as *25-hour*, *16-year-old*, *!important*, *3D*. Tokens such as *post-1945*, *mp3* or *CO2* are words because they start with a letter. ([https://www.sketchengine.eu/my\\_keywords/non-word/](https://www.sketchengine.eu/my_keywords/non-word/), retrieved on September 22, 2021).

are only two basic smell word candidates in Bosnian – *miris* and *smrad*.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the two target expressions are based on randomness and are the result of the Sketch Engine algorithms, which provided a considerable number of examples.

In addition, each of the target words was run through the thesaurus function again to identify corresponding synonymous expressions in the verb domain. *Miris*-related verb forms are: *namirisati* (English: smell), *disati* (English: breathe), *pomirisati* (English: sniff), *osjetiti* (English: smell, literally: sense ), *mirisati na* (English: smell like).<sup>7</sup> Only two *smrad*-related verb forms were found in the corpus: *zaudarati* (English: stench ) and *tuknuti na* (English: stink like).<sup>8</sup>

The original intent of the study was to detect and analyze olfactory expressions that occur in the Bosnian language. However, when the basic smell words were identified, it became apparent that the target words were consistently used in a figurative sense. Hence, the goal of the study was aligned with the results of the corpus. A consistent pattern in the use of simile was observed and further investigated. For *miris*-related verb forms, *namirisati* was used figuratively 6 times, *disati* three times, *pomirisati* was not used figuratively, *osjetiti* and *udisati* were used figuratively once, while *mirisati na* was used figuratively 573 times (out of a total of 868 units). On the *smrad*-related verb forms side, *zaudarati* was used figuratively three times, while *tuknuti na* had 18 figurative renderings (out of a total of 23 units). Therefore, the figurative potential of *mirisati na* and *tuknuti na* was investigated in more detail.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that apart from its general sense, i.e., the smell (of something), *miris*, as well as its verb form *mirisati*, is frequently used to signify how nice something smells, as in *miris doma* (English: the smell of home), or *Ovo baš miriše* (English: This really smells nice).

<sup>7</sup> There is also the adjectival form *mirišljiv/mirisan* which did not yield figurative renderings. *Mirisati poput*, a synonymous expression to *mirisati na* (also translated as smell like), did not yield figurative usage. Needless to say, the two target words are not the only ones found, there are several others like *vonj*, *aroma* and *miruh*, however, those were not statistically important as they were not used by netizens in the given corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Both are informal.



Having established the figurative potential in the two olfactory expressions, the main hypothesis can be formulated as follows: The two target olfactory expressions exhibit consistent figurative potential. The hypothesis gives rise to the following research questions:

- a. How do olfactory expressions behave in a figurative context? Can any particular patterns be discerned in their use?
- b. Do olfactory expressions exhibit consistency with their standard meaning (i.e., the positive-by-default olfactory expression is only used to figuratively express a positive connotation, while the negative-by-default olfactory expression is reserved only for a positive connotation)?

## Simile

Most often, simile is discussed simultaneously with metaphor because the two tropes converge on a number of points (see Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). Thus, before we fully explore the field of simile, we must draw parallels between metaphor and simile. Contemporary work places simile in the shadow of its ostensible big brother, metaphor, especially in the field of cognitive linguistics (Kövecses, 2005; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Needless to say, conceptual metaphor is indeed ubiquitous in the corpora (Charteris-Black, 2004; Maslo, 2019). Metaphor and simile have been treated as essentially similar since Aristotle (Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014: 138). They have been compared in different ways: “simile is just a metaphor with the scaffolding still up” (Geary, 2011: 6); metaphor is a condensed or elliptic simile (Richards, cited in Black, 1993); metaphor is an indirect comparison while simile is a direct one (Ortony 1979, cited in Glucksberg, 2001). So, “Which comes first, the metaphorical egg or the chicken of similitude?” (Glucksberg, *ibid.*: 29).

The 2004 paper by Israel et al. answers a number of questions. The authors place simile between metaphor and literal comparison, claiming that it resembles literal comparison because simile also makes the process of comparison obvious (using the words *like* and *as* most of the time), while at the same time it has metaphorical properties because it



is essentially figurative. Furthermore, Israel et al. claim, that metaphor and simile are not just a pair of interchangeable expressions, giving examples of both sides (“Her argument was somewhat mirky” as a metaphor vs. trying to render the same idea through simile “Her argument was like something mirky”; conversely, the simile “The windshield wipers made a great clatter like two idiots clapping in church” cannot be rendered as a metaphor “The clattering windshield wipers were idiots clapping in church,” pp. 128-129).

Metaphors and similes require different comprehension strategies. Because metaphors are grammatically identical to literal class inclusions, they invite categorizing the target as a member of a category named by the source. Likewise, because similes are grammatically identical to literal comparison statements, they invite the target to be compared to the literal source concept (Gentner and Bowdle, 2008: 119).

Moder (2008), on the other hand, found in a 500,000-word spoken news discourse corpus that the most colloquially salient indicator of simile – the word *like* – was used mainly for categorization purposes (39%). The same word was used for comparative purposes in 32% of the cases. Thus, a clear boundary between the use of metaphors and similes, as indicated in the above quotation from Gentner and Bowdle, cannot be drawn.

To disambiguate the scope of simile, Moder (ibid.) proposes a trichotomy of simile: conventional simile, narrow-scope simile, and broad-scope simile. Conventional simile requires no additional explanation in context (e.g., *like sheep to slaughter*). Such simile examples have become conventionalized through repeated use. How speakers of a language come to a consensus on the conventionalization of simile, and what frequency the target expression must reach before it is considered a convention, is partly discussed below.

A new type of simile is narrow-scope simile. It operates on the principle of focusing on only one aspect of the source domain only, usually “a vivid or extreme example of a perceptual pattern (buzzing like a beehive refers to sound, while turning his body like a snake describes

the perceived flexibility in the dancer's movement)" (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014: 143). Moder (2008: 312) gives the following example as representative of a narrow-scope simile

- 1) But at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel this morning, Bush supporters were out in full force for a breakfast fund-raiser. Governor Engler stood smiling at the door like the proud father at a wedding reception. Engler, however, shrugs off his yearlong effort. (ATC, 1/11/00)

Example 1) harnesses the figurative potential of the source domain. However, it does so on a limited, targeted scale. The governor is compared to a proud father, but this is the only element from the WEDDING RECEPTION frame that is encoded in the utterance. In this case, listeners are not asked to conjure up numerous other elements of the wedding festivities. The only conclusion the listener must draw is that the father's joy is transferred from the wedding celebration scenario to the governor. Conversely, it is not possible for the listener to infer anything other than the intended meaning. It turns out that there is a "correct" answer, a rendering that is considered the only correct one. When such similes are mappings, they do not make much of the domains used as "sources" but instead focus on a salient attribute of the evoked situation in order to apply it to a situation for which that attribute is usually much less salient or extreme (Dancygier & Sweetser, *ibid.*: 143). Examples such as 1) have a sufficiently general background context for listeners to correctly grasp the speaker's intended meaning (even if the sentence with the bolded part were to stand alone). However, the formula as X as Y is not a foolproof device. Dancygier & Sweetser (*ibid.*) cite Raymond Chandler's "He looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food" to point out that the same formula can be used for both similarity and dissimilarity, Chandler's sentence being an example of the latter. Although they are of opposite natures (similarity and dissimilarity), both cases rely on the listener's background knowledge of what is and is not appropriate as a rendering in the (very) specific context.

A broad simile requires more engagement on the part of the listener. In this type of simile, the speaker first presents an incongruent, puzzling

scenario that allows for different renderings, and then provides the “correct” interpretation immediately afterwards.

- 2) **Life is like a box of chocolates.** You never know what you’re gonna get. (Forrest Gump, 1994, director Robert Zemeckis) (Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014: 145)

The initial claim in 2) establishes a comparison for which there may be different solutions (all of them relatively “correct”). Based on personal assumptions and beliefs, the hearer can establish various meaningful scenarios from the life-like-a-chocolate-box simile (e.g., different types of chocolate reflecting different personality traits, ornateness of chocolate boxes, or, as in example 2, the surprise-effect as the *tertium comparationis*). By broadening the simile, the speaker ensures that the hearer understood the comparison as initially intended. Otherwise, in the absence of an explicit context, speakers will create one for themselves based on their knowledge of typical situations and their default values (Coulson, 2001: 25). In other words, listeners will understand the simile in a way that *feels* most natural to them. Besides that, the simile itself does not suffice for the simile effect to take place. In broad-scope simile, the follow-up, also dubbed “elaboration” by Cuenca and Romano (2013), guided interpretation is as important to the entire construction as the simile itself. It is not just for purposes of proper understanding, but also as a mere communicational means, since the actual simile would only stand there as a cliffhanger without meaningful ending.

Lou (2017: 115) observes that the underlying logic of broad-scope simile resembles Coulson’s (ibid) concept of frame-shifting. While it is true that both concepts have similar layouts, frame-shifting is more oriented towards intentionally setting up a scenario for which the listener is likely to have prototypical expectations, only to provide further inputs that disprove the listener’s initial assumptions. Jokes are a good example of that. They are devised with the intention to “deceive” the listener, thus ending in a witty punchline. While incongruity is common with both frame-shifting and broad-scope simile, with the latter, the speaker does not intend to “mislead” listeners but invite them to see similarities between the two concepts. Moder (ibid: 317) concludes that broad-scope

similes “most often encoded relational features that could entail aspects of both comparison and categorization. This dual function may be related to the dual discourse functions of *like*.”

## Results

Results show that basic smell expressions indeed do the job of comparison and categorization, as the function of simile is most often described in the literature. *Tuknuti na*, the stench-related basic smell word, generated 83% for simile as categorization while 17 percent of the examples were used for comparison purposes (Figure 2). *Mirisati na*, as the basic smell expression with default positive associations, on the other hand, resulted in 69% of examples on the comparison side while 31% were rendered as categorization (Figure 3).

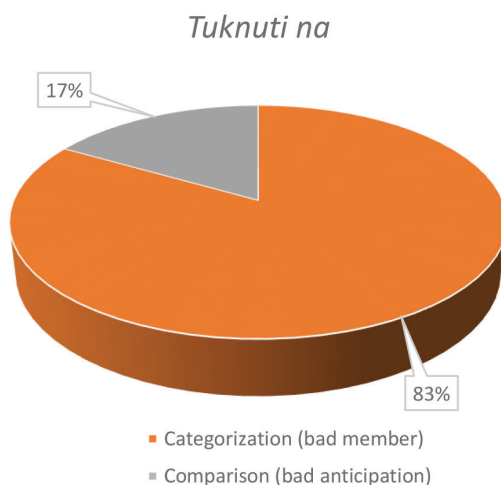


Figure 2 - “Tuknuti na” basic smell expression

Comparison and categorization in both olfactory expressions only answer one part of the question, namely, *what* is done by the simile. The other part of the equation presents itself in the question of *how* simile does the comparison. Hence, categorization renders good and bad members (of a given category) while comparison is based on good or bad anticipation.

As previously said, *tuknuti na* has a negative connotation in general use (i.e., stench), which is consistent with findings in both categorization and comparison, that is, the former showed examples of *bad* members of a category while examples in the latter were used for *bad* anticipation. *Mirisati na*, on the other hand, has a positive connotation in general use, however, it did not yield only good category members (categorization) and good anticipation (comparison). What is more, results show that bad anticipation (35%) is the most frequent use of *mirisati na* in total (indeed, only slightly more than good anticipation with 34%).

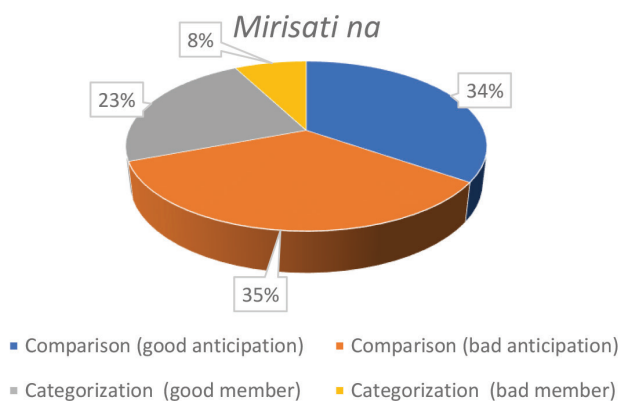


Figure 3 - “Mirisati na” basic smell expression

## Discussion

As has been suggested in the previous section, two layers of simile use were determined in the corpus. Results give answers to two questions – *what* simile does and *how* simile does it. The *what* question is answered by comparison and categorization, functions of simile generally accepted as the norm (in the literature). The *how* part, however, emerged from the specific use in the corpus and gives answers to the question how comparison and categorization are performed. Hence, the two layers can be presented as follows:

Table 1 - Two layers of simile

Function of simile (the what)	Simile usage (the how)	
Categorization	Good category member	Bad category member
Comparison	Good anticipation	Bad anticipation

Quite intuitively, categorization is accomplished by using either *good* or *bad members* of a category, meaning that language users align their perception of an entity with presumed salient properties of a category. For example, if something “stinks of/like poverty” then the agreed-upon negative connotation of poverty as a category lends its properties to the target word/concept via the olfactory expression. However, comparison is done by either *good* or *bad anticipation*. This use of comparison is dubbed *anticipation* because it shows how netizens compare entities/phenomena to show what they think will happen based on current observations and their previous experience on the subject at hand. The distinction between good and bad anticipation is rather obvious. If netizens, e.g., said that something “smells like plunder”, it was deemed bad anticipation while examples like “it smells like a good match” were dubbed good anticipation, however, both with the intention of forecasting future events. The overall discourse surrounding the anticipatory use of comparison aids in creating the “scenario” and the proper meaning.

*Tuknuti na* as a negative connotation basic smell word was used for categorization purposes to a large extent (83%).

Commenting on financial interest in banks, a netizen wrote:

- 3) *Neka mi neko pojasni gdje tukne na kamatu jer je ovo nacin na koji sam shvatio poslovanje jedne druge banke.* (Translation: Someone explain to me why this **stinks of interest** because this is the way I figured another bank operates.)

Another netizen, commenting the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, wrote:

- 4) *Ali, s druge strane, ima jako mnogo, plaćenih i onih odveć drgovoljnih tendencija, koje tuknu na islamofobiju.* (Translation: But, on the other hand, there are a lot of sponsored and overly voluntary tendencies that **stink of islamophobia**.)

Simile “requires that two essentially dissimilar domains are evaluated with respect to potential similarity” and that “[s]uch examples do indeed select an attribute to guide the explicit comparison” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014: 138). Similarity in dissimilarity is rather obvious with examples 3) and 4).<sup>9</sup> What is dissimilar between the olfactory expression and the target concepts is that the latter do not exercise any olfactory trait. What is similar, however, is that stench, on one hand, and financial interest and islamophobia, on the other hand, have respective negative connotations. In this regard, listeners will quite confidently arrive at the proper meaning owing to the overlapping negative connotation of stench on one side and financial interest and hatred against Islam on the other. However, the convergence of negative connotations between *tuknuti na* and its target concept is only half of the equation. It seems that the *tuknuti na* simile itself triggers negative projection, regardless of what connotation its target concept has. To prove this point, an unorthodox yet comprehensible example was excerpted from the corpus.

- 5) *Ali, pošto u ovoj rubrici već godinama raspirujemo sistematski prezir prema omladini i svemu što tukne na mladost, u ekstremno superiornom i nadmenom raspoloženju ignoriramo tu upadicu i vraćamo se predmetnom slučaju.* (Translation: But, as we have been provoking systemic contempt towards the youth and anything that **stinks of the youth** in an extremely condescending and conceited fashion over the years, let's ignore that heckle and get back to the matter at hand.)

<sup>9</sup> This is only a select number of figurative usages of *tuknuti na*. Other combinatory dissimilarities of the target expression are: cheating, fascism, disease, tense situation, youth, hatred speech, treaty, communist dung, red (Communist) occultism, verbal offense, Bosnia and Bosniaks, highly aestheticized and refined contemporary civic patriotism.



The netizen who posted the comment above obviously reacts to a previous remark in a rather sarcastic tone. The *tuknuti na* simile is, therefore, to be understood as the writer assuming the viewpoint of one of the earlier commentators, i.e., her/his bad remarks about the youth. A further indicator for the netizen's attitude towards the earlier comment is also the use of "strong" and somewhat exaggerated phrasing like "provoking systemic contempt", "extremely condescending and conceited fashion", and "let's ignore that heckle and get back to the matter at hand". It can be stated that youth both conceptually and practically has a good connotation. Even though secondary in a structural sense, the actual rendering of the simile in 5) is there to capture the commentator's change in viewpoint for the purpose of making a solid argument.<sup>10</sup>

Example 3) to 5) prompt the listener/reader to see a correlation between the dissimilar domains, however, the evoked similarity does not come from experience but associative meaning. In the light of this discussion, it is important to mention Casasanto's (2013) claim (cited in Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014: 141) that discusses the entrenchment of combinatory possibilities found in similes.

Such predicative constructions can then become entrenched themselves. Casasanto (2013) argues that there is a category of mappings, which he refers to as *analogical*, which do not emerge from correlations in experience, but from correlations in entrenched linguistic usage. We have no experience of lawyers and sharks together, but once the description of lawyers as Sharks becomes established, the frames evoked in the context may allow one to refer to a lawyer as a *shark*.

It is, then, that the similes in question only figuratively reflect, and harness the associative power of *tuknuti na* and do not paint a mental image as vivid as in the example of the governor in the wedding reception scenario. By analogy, the figurative stench takes precedence over both actual life experience and a lack of scent emission in target concept. In

<sup>10</sup> Even though neither Discourse Viewpoint (see Dancygier and Vandelanotte, 2016) nor the realm of pragmatics *per se* are the subject of this paper, the simile in example 6) does have a rhetoric function.

other words, entrenched linguistic usage in the light of the basic smell expression at hand can be understood as whatever is found in the construction “*tuknuti na* + noun” gets a negative-connotation label. In that regard, we can speak of a narrow-scope simile that has been abbreviated to a dominant basic smell word and its target concept (word). The “attribute to guide the explicit comparison” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014: 138) is superimposed by the basic smell expression *tuknuti na* and does not represent the most salient among other attitudes but rather *the only* attribute coded in the basic smell word itself. Therefore, instances as such can be dubbed *single-scope*<sup>11</sup> *simile* due to the fact that listeners do not choose among the (many) attributes of the target concept.

*Tuknuti na* did not render any good category members.

Besides the widespread use of *tuknuti na* for categorization purposes (83%, see Figure 2), this basic smell word is also used for comparison, in an anticipatory manner.

- 6) obzirom da nemam te sposobnosti, a kada ih primjetim svrstam ih u vlastite predrasude. Samo da ovo ne bi tuknulo na verbalni delikt, jal paranormalne sposobnosti. Molim te pojasni mi na cemu je zasnovana ta tvoja tvrdnja. (Translation: since I don't have those abilities, which, even when I notice them, I classify them as my personal biases. I don't want this to **stink of verbal offense** or paranormal abilities. I want you to, please, tell me what your claim is based on.
- 7) prošlo je dovoljno vremena, pa se komotno može zaključiti da to tukne na nategnutost , improvizaciju i zbrdazdolisanost. (Translation: enough time has passed that we can confidently conclude that it **stinks of tenseness, improvisation, and randomness.**)

In back translation, “stinks of verbal offense” in 6) figuratively stands for “to eventually become” in the original text. Likewise, “stinks of tenseness, improvisation, and randomness” has the meaning of “it's obvious

<sup>11</sup> Not to be confused with the name of one of four integration networks proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002).

where this is going”. Both examples make use of simile for a comparison type we dubbed “bad anticipation”, i.e., labeling the figurative olfactory expression negatively in terms of discourse anticipation. The reason the similes are “bad” is due to the basic smell word and its saliency in negative connotation. The reason it is anticipation can be understood in the context of a wider discourse as to what can be deduced from the previously mentioned discourse and where the conversation/discussion is heading. In other words, the comparison simile performs in examples 6) and 7) first detects the target (verbal offence and tenseness etc.), then aligns it with the negatively connoted olfactory expression only then to put discourse in a “timeline” perspective as to say where “things are going”. Like in *tuknuti na* for negative categorization, the negative projection of *tuknuti na* onto its target concept is also present with comparison for anticipatory purposes. However, the discourse layout is to be perceived differently. In the latter, the listener is not invited to perceive “verbal offense” and “tenseness, improvisation, and randomness” as categories in which the subject at hand is placed. In the examples cited and the like, viewpoint is shifted towards how the speaker sees discourse develop and as to what the overall opponent’s message is about. In other words, the latter simile use has more of a critical tone than *tuknuti na* as categorization simile.

*Mirisati na*, the positive-by-default connotation figurative olfactory expression is more frequently used in the corpus and richer in figurative rendering. As can be seen in Figure 3, not only does *mirisati na* perform both categorization and comparison, but it also branches out into subcategories – good/bad anticipation and good/bad category member respectively. In fact, counter-intuitively rather, bad anticipation as a means of comparison stands out with the positively connoted olfactory expression *mirisati na*.

On the comparison side, anticipation makes 69% of the entire figurative potential of *mirisati na* – 35% for bad anticipation and 34% for good anticipation.

- 8) I sve bi to bilo u redu da se to odvijalo u miru. Sve miriše na ratnu pljačku, a pod okriljem zakona o zaštiti društvene. (Translation:

All that would have been fine if it had been going on in peace. Everything **smells like plunder** under the auspices of the public property protection act.)

- 9) Istrajnost je samodisciplina i istinsko merilo vaše vere u sebe. Unapred odlučite da se nikada nećete predati Sve miriše na stečaj u tuzlanskoj Diti. (Translation: Persistence is self-discipline and a true measure of your faith in yourselves. You decide to never give up beforehand. Everything smells like insolvency in Dita.)

Not only do the similes above resemble *tuknuti na* syntactically, but there is complete concordance in the semantic content as well. Simply put, *tuknuti na* for bad anticipation and *mirisati na* for the same purpose mean exactly the same even though the olfactory expression have opposite meanings in essence. It has been argued that *tuknuti na* projects its negative connotation on the adjacent noun regardless of the quality of the latter, with *mirisati na* for bad anticipation purposes, the opposite seems to be the case. Plunder and insolvency have inherently bad connotations which reflect on *mirisati na* in a process of reverse mapping (b is a).

- 10) postavljen je transparent sa tekstom Dobrodošli bosanski Zmajevi. U Zenici sve miriše na dobru utakmicu u Zenici. (Translation: A banner writing „Welcome Bosnian Dragons“ has been put up. Everything **smells like a good match** in Zenica.)
- 11) Izvor TV1 tvrdi da su razgovori delegacija SDA i SBB-a bili veoma konstruktivni, da će biti nastavljani, te da sve miriše na mnogo drugačiju saradnju stranaka od one koja je obilježila protekli period (Translation: TV1 sources claim that negotiations between delegations of SDA and SBB have been very constructive and that they are going to continue. Everything **smells like a much different cooperation** between the parties as opposed previous attempts.)

In *mirisati na* for positive anticipation (examples 10) and 11)), the noun phrase following the target olfactory expression dictates the

overall semantic content. The discourse layout is such that the target concept following the olfactory expression does not necessarily have a salient positive connotation. It is rather the entire build-up to the target expression that tells the listener it is (to be perceived as) good anticipation. Since the examples presented are single-scope similes in Moder's (2008) understanding, the entire "scenario" is to be taken into account when parsing the simile. In 10), it is the overall atmosphere before a football match of the national team while in 11) it is "constructive talks" that help create (and understand the simile).

- 12) Šljivovica oštro miriše, gledaš u daljinu. Snijeg svuda, pucketa vatra, a mokra drva se tek suše. Sve miriše na vrijeme kojeg više nema. (Translation: Šljivovica smells strongly, you look into the distance. Snow everywhere, fire crackles, and wet wood is just drying. Everything **smells of a time that is gone**.)
- 13) Sve miriše na Bosnu : kako i ne bi, kad je pojam Bosna upotrijebljen deset puta, pridjev bosanski također deset puta. (Translation: Everything **smells of Bosnia**: how wouldn't it (?), having in mind that the term 'Bosnia' has been used ten times, the adjective 'Bosnian' also ten times.)

Examples 12) and 13) are representative of categorization with good category members for *mirisati na*. In both examples do netizens paint a picture in which their view of the phenomenon at hand resembles the target concept. "The time gone" and "Bosnia" are categories with the feature of smell attributed. Needless to say, both represent a subjective account of what "the time gone" and "Bosnia" may or do represent. What is interesting from a simile point of view is that netizens in comments 12) and 13) are "reminded of" the two target concepts, thus categorizing their respective experience via the olfactory expression *mirisati na*.

*Mirisati na* uses simile for bad categorization in 8 per cent of the cases in the corpus. Like the unorthodox, yet plausible example in 5) and rather counter-intuitively, the positive-by-default olfactory expression does render bad category members.

- 14) Lavina optužbi Kruga 99 na račun Fatmira Alispahića miriše na najcrnja staljinistička vremena. (Translation: The barrage of accusations by Krug 99<sup>12</sup> against Fatmir Alispahić **smells of the darkest Stalin era**.)

Despite the surprising discrepancy between the positive olfactory expression on one side and the negatively connoted use on the other, example 14) clearly uses simile for categorization purposes. The barrage of accusations is given a Stalinist label, hence categorized as communist, i.e., harmful, retrograde etc. Like in examples 8) and 9) – *mirisati na* for anticipatory purposes – it seems that the concept that follows this olfactory expression projects its connotations back onto *mirisati na*. In this regard, 14) could also be translated as “...stinks of the darkest Stalin era” because they are alike semantically.

## Conclusion

Olfactory language is indeed underrepresented in a majority of world languages, as has been shown. Bosnian seems to follow that trend. However, the corpus at hand and the data-driven approach in this paper showed not only the mere presence of olfactory language but also its figurative use. Two basic smell expressions – *tuknuti na* and *mirisati na* – have been selected, the criteria being that they do not refer to a particular source. The focus of the study was to detect how the two olfactory expressions are used in the corpus. Simile surfaced as the main vehicle for the target expressions. From what can be concluded from the corpus and the discussion, simile with olfactory expressions gets both categorization and comparison done. Two layers of simile were detected. Comparison and categorization answer the question *what* simile does in the corpus while concrete examples on both sides showed *how* simile does it. The latter question gave a number of invaluable insights. Categorization, quite understandably, uses good and bad category members for simile. Categorization is performed when netizens label the entity/phenomenon at hand as something specific, i.e.,

<sup>12</sup> Bosnian Association of Independent Intellectuals.

as a member of a certain group (interest, plunder etc.). *Tuknuti na*, the negatively connoted olfactory expression, rendered only bad category members in the corpus while *mirisati na* showed both good and bad category members. Comparison, on the other hand, only invites anticipation on the commentator's part, with both olfactory expressions. Simply put, the comparison performed with olfactory expressions can be explained as "this how I (the language user) think things are going to be". The language user proposes a rationale in which s/he aligns the topic at hand with the target concept with while simultaneously indicating future development based on the comparison.

Another invaluable finding of the study relates directly to the two olfactory expressions. As can be understood from the discussion, *tuknuti na* projects its negative connotation onto the target concept regardless of what the true nature of the latter is while *mirisati na* gets projected at in the same fashion. In other words, the positive-by-default *mirisati na* can render the exact same meaning as its counterpart if what follow has a bad connotation. This can be explained, as has been discussed, by entrenched language usage, meaning that whatever comes after *tuknuti na* is negative while whatever is preceded by *mirisati na* gets to determine the connotation.

In conclusion, olfactory remains a potent yet underexplored field. This study focussed on a select number of olfactory expressions with simile usage in the Bosnian language. However, future studies will need to take on a more fine-grained approach in order to get even more insights into the how olfaction is used. As has been mentioned throughout the paper, there are other potential target words on both sides, however, only the two that were covered in the paper were used by netizens in the *Sketch Engine* corpus. On the simile side, this figure remains to be omnipresent in language with olfaction only being another field comparison and categorization are used in.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their invaluable insights that significantly improved the manuscript.



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## Online resources

<https://app.sketchengine.eu/>

<https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/09/03/is-english-better-than-other-languages/>

<http://www.statistika.ba/?show=8#link4>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tai-languages>

# Miris poređenja: Olfaktorni izrazi i njihov figurativni potencijal u bosanskom jeziku

**Sažetak:** U ovom radu analiziraju se izrazi koji koriste olfaktornu domenu kao figurativni izvor u bosanskom jeziku. Autentični tekstovi preuzeti s web aplikacije *Sketch Engine* korišteni su kao korpus za studiju. Web korpus obuhvata blogove, portale s vijestima i druge web stranice koje koriste olfaktorne izraze bilo u glavnim tekstovima ili u odgovarajućim komentarima. Utvrđena su dva osnovna olfaktorna izraza koji imaju najveći figurativni potencijal i stoga su detaljnije ispitana u ovoj studiji. Rezultati oba osnovna olfaktorna izraza mirisa ukazuju na to da se oni uglavnom koriste u figurativnom smislu, s tim da figura poređenja dolazi u prvi plan. Drugi rezultat ove studije je da se olfaktorni izrazi koriste u svrhu anticipiranja poruke unutar diskursa.

**Ključne riječi:** olfaktorni jezik, poređenje, olfakcija, bosanski jezik, figurativni jezik

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