

Pavlo Shopin\*

# Multisensory perception and tactile metaphors for voice in the work of Herta Müller

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2019-2011>

**Abstract:** In this article, I examine tactile metaphors for voice in the work of Herta Müller. I use conceptual metaphor theory and consider the process of multisensory perception to argue that tactile metaphors can activate multiple senses. Müller evokes tactile experience to reason about voice in her works. These seemingly modality-specific metaphors relate voice to more than one sensory impression. While multisensory perception enables the author to associate her characters' voices creatively with different sensory phenomena, it simultaneously problematizes scholarly efforts to analyze metaphorical language and categorize figurative associations according to sensory modalities. In her literary works, tactile metaphors for voice appear well-established and even conventional, but Müller defamiliarizes them and foregrounds a metaphorical reading of tactile language. Since analytical reasoning about metaphors can be problematic because of multisensory perception, Müller's works can be challenging to interpret as she focuses the reader's attention on the figurative meaning of language.

**Keywords:** tactile metaphor, touch, multisensory perception, Herta Müller, voice, defamiliarization

## 1 Introduction

The article analyzes tactile metaphors for voice as the sound of speaking in the works of the Romanian-born German writer Herta Müller, who won the 2009 Nobel Prize for Literature. Müller writes about social oppression (Eddy 2013: 84), often reflecting on the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Her literary works are marked by her first-person narrative perspective and a principled confrontation with totalitarianism and illiberalism (Haines 1998: 122). Müller is highly attuned to language (Kohl 2013: 20; Watson 2014: 143, 154) and regularly uses metaphors

---

\*Corresponding author: Pavlo Shopin, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Berlin, Germany; English Department, Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, E-mail: pavel\_shopin@yahoo.com

(Bozzi 2013: 115; Shopin 2016: 1068) to understand its adjustment to conditions of suffering and subjugation.

As I will argue, Müller not only carefully works with, but also defamiliarizes linguistic conventions, and foregrounds a metaphorical reading of tactile language. She encourages readers to see the figurative nature of everyday language and invites them to imagine her characters' voices as things that can be touched in her texts. This line of argument is consistent with Marven's proposition that "Müller's narratives challenge textual conventions, [...] presenting the text as a physical artefact" (2005: 102; see also Köhnen 1997: 128). I also agree with Viktor Shklovsky, who argued in his seminal essay "Art, as Device" that writers estrange everyday language in their works. According to Shklovsky, poets have distinct styles not because they create unique images, but because they arrange ordinary images in original ways: "The work done by schools of poetry consists in accumulating verbal material and finding new ways of arranging and handling it; it is much more about rearranging images than about creating them" (2015 [1917]: 158). Actually, in an interview with the *Spiegel* magazine, Müller discusses her writing and comments that "I always take only the most ordinary [words], and when I put them together, then something new emerges" (Beyer 2012: 130). Her view resonates with the interpretation of poetic metaphor in cognitive literary studies: poetic metaphor is said to result from estranging conventional tropes (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 215).

This study will challenge the assumption that voice literally stands for a purely acoustic phenomenon and will explore whether it is conceptualized *ad hoc* and does not exist in isolation from other sensory experiences and, more generally, from various circumstances. Voice is not just sound; it can be understood only in the relevant linguistic, bodily, and cultural contexts. At the very least, it is associated with those sensory impressions perceived simultaneously with sound.

The relationship between perception and conception is well established in the framework of cognitive psychology. Barsalou, the author of the perceptual theory of knowledge, suggests that "cognition is inherently perceptual, sharing systems with perception at both the cognitive and the neural levels" (1999: 577). Gallese and Lakoff posit that "rational thought is an exploitation of the normal operations of our bodies" and that "language makes direct use of the same brain structures used in perception and action" (2005: 473). These tenets of cognitive psychology are fundamental to my analysis of figurative language. Accordingly, in this paper, I will explore how a writer can use tactile experience to present metaphorically the complex image of voice, and thereby my study will support the embodied view of meaning and cognition.

The aim of this paper is to analyze how Müller engages tactile experience to make sense of voice in her works. To that end, I draw on conceptual metaphor

theory, developed by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999). The theory postulates that metaphors fundamentally rely on sensorimotor experiences. And indeed Müller consistently evokes such experiences for the metaphorical presentation of voice. Therefore, this article focuses on the metaphorical conceptualization of voice through the vehicle of tactile experience and aims to reveal how these metaphors depend on and estrange conceptual and linguistic conventions.

The following four sections will (1) outline the relationship between multisensory perception, metaphor and defamiliarization; (2) review critical engagement with the concept of voice in the work of Herta Müller; (3) analyze the tropes that demonstrate the figurative connection between voice and touch; and (4) draw conclusions about Müller's use of multisensory metaphors for voice and about the defamiliarizations they may cause.

## 2 Multisensory perception, metaphor and defamiliarization

It is not entirely clear why different modes of sensory experience are evoked to reason about auditory perception. *Multisensory metaphor* may be a suitable term for this situation, but it does not explain why exactly this happens. Ning Yu refers to this trope as “synesthetic metaphor, i.e. metaphor that maps across various sensory domains” (2003: 20). Synesthesia, however, is a distinct and rare cognitive phenomenon that does not correlate with the conventionality and ubiquity of metaphors that map across different senses. Hence I prefer the term *multisensory metaphor*. In contrast to synesthesia, multisensory perception is common and may help understand the motivation for such metaphors as originating in the nature of human perception, which routinely involves more than one sense. In other words, in the course of human interaction with the environment, the sense of hearing works in synchrony with other senses. When two or more sensory experiences co-occur, they can be bound together to form a multisensory image and can hence be associated with each other as parts of the same conceptual *frame* (Fillmore 1982: 111). Humans have evolved to perceive and explore the environment through multiple sensory channels; therefore, different sensory perceptions can correlate and later be used to explain auditory experience metaphorically.

Thinking about voice, people engage different senses due to the multisensory nature of perception (see Gibbs 2006: 229–231). Sounds constantly occur along with other sensory stimuli and human senses work together as “observers

integrate signals from multiple sensory modalities into percepts” (Deroy et al. 2016: 744). The construal of multisensory images (percepts) enables people to succeed in their interaction with the world because it allows them to identify and deal with those things that can harm or benefit them. Vanessa Harrar et al. (2017: 763) remark that “[i]ntegrating information from individual senses increases the chance of survival by reducing the variability in the incoming signals, thus allowing us to respond more rapidly. [...] This response facilitation is traditionally attributed to multisensory integration.” For instance, a falling mortar shell, a jumping tiger, or a skidding car are not just auditory or visual images, they are more than that in terms of sensory perception and are conceived of as potential life threats.

Multisensory perception makes metaphor a natural way of thinking about things, as metaphors provide us with an opportunity to reason about relatively abstract things with the help of more concrete concepts. Sensorimotor experiences can be the prime example of such concrete phenomena. For instance, indifference or hostility are complex social concepts that can be conveyed through the experience of cold. If someone’s voice is said to be cold, people associate this sensory image with the emotional state of the speaker. The experience of cold is tangible and vividly communicates the message. In a similar vein, the acoustic properties of voice can be associated with other sensory experiences, as with the expression “a sharp voice,” which can refer to both vision and touch. Since sensory experiences are routinely bound together and possibly integrated into multisensory images, perception can organize conceptual frames and hence lay the foundation for cross-domain associations, such as metaphors.

However, multisensory metaphors should not be confused with *multimodal metaphors*, defined by Charles Forceville as “metaphors in which target, source, and/or mappable features are represented or suggested by at least two different sign systems (one of which may be language) or modes of perception” (2008: 463). In this paper, the term *multisensory* refers to the sensory modalities evoked by metaphors and not to the sign system or medium of metaphor representation, and my focus is exclusively on verbal metaphors and their conceptualization. While multisensory perception could well be the cause of the formation of metaphors, it is also a confounding factor in readers’ efforts to analyze metaphors and categorize their experiences into sensory modalities.

Analyzing the voice metaphors in the fiction and non-fiction of Herta Müller, I found that there is no overarching stable concept or single coherent frame of voice in her texts, but rather a mosaic of different meanings. Müller seems to decide how to present voice depending on the context. I agree with Kövecses, who posits that “variation in metaphorical conceptualization is a result of the

various types of contexts” (2015: 156). Importantly, cognitive linguistics emphasizes the motivated nature of language and its embodiment: “It is a fundamental hypothesis of cognitive linguistics that meaning involves motivated mappings from conceptualization to expression” (Sinha 1999: 229). Consequently, voice is not an arbitrary collection of ideas and associations. And since metaphor establishes mappings between different domains of experience and commonly relies on sensorimotor images, it is a natural way of thinking, speaking, and writing about voice.

Müller estranges the intuitive relationship between sound and touch, and draws attention to the figurative nature of her language. Thus defamiliarization allows her to shed light on and to question the things commonly taken for granted (Shklovsky 2015 [1917]: 162). This vision of art could be associated with the current research on automaticity in cognitive processes. For example, John A. Bargh et al. (2012) speak about “the automatic influence of concrete physical states and experiences on abstract psychological and interpersonal processes” (593), and suggest that “activation automatically spreads from concepts activated by physical experiences to their metaphorically-related social and psychological concepts” (596). Müller disrupts such automaticity and helps the reader see the figurative roots of tactile metaphors for voice.

### 3 On voice in Müller criticism

The metaphorical conceptualization of voice in Müller’s oeuvre has only briefly been analyzed by literary critics. This lack of interest can be explained by the fact that the author does not mention voice as a major theme in her reflections on her own writing, nor does voice become a subject of discussion among the characters in her literary works. On the one hand, some scholars use voice as a source domain to create metaphors of their own and to speak about the authorial style of Herta Müller, because voice is a well-established vehicle in metaphors for literary writing. Thus, Anja K. Johannsen expresses a wish to investigate how Müller’s “literary and political voice maintains its distinctive and unmistakable sound” (2013: 208). Likewise using voice as a metaphor for individual style, Iulia-Karin Patrut describes Müller’s novel *Herztier* (*The Land of Green Plums*) as “a demonstration of the steps towards artistic articulation of a personal literary voice” (2006: 200). Patrut construes Müller’s creative style as a “personal artistic voice” (2006: 201). Lyn Marven also uses voice as a trope when she comments that “Müller’s distinctive poetic vision and narrative voice [...] are in part the product of the repressive conditions in Romania” (2005: 244). In a

slightly different manner, Katja Suren invokes the perceptual image of losing one's voice as a vehicle to describe the possibility of communication and resistance as an essential theme in the works of several writers including Müller: "The loss of 'voice', and/or the ability to use a common language and to respond to the violent address, [...] is thematized" (2011: 33). The above examples remain isolated conventional uses of voice as a metaphorical vehicle, and none of these scholars consistently extends the metaphor or discusses Müller's conceptualization of voice.

On the other hand, some critics examine voice in Müller's works, but without explicitly identifying its metaphorical potential. For example, Herta Haupt-Cucuiu (1996) undertakes an insightful but rather brief analysis of the psychological aspects of voice representation in Müller's texts. Starting with the well-known fact that loudness and pitch belong to the individual features of the human voice (Haupt-Cucuiu 1996: 57), she gives a psychological interpretation of loudness: "The psychology of expression [*Ausdruckspsychologie*] has a consensus on the loud voice. Dominance is ascribed to people with a louder voice, whether it be character or intentional dominance" (Haupt-Cucuiu 1996: 58). This interpretation is relevant for the role of voice in character description. Haupt-Cucuiu posits that the quiet voice in Müller's texts is "not only a signal for submission and inferiority, it is also associated with 'warm', 'sensitive' [*gefühlvoll*], and 'humane' [*menschlich*]" (1996: 58). In particular, Haupt-Cucuiu reviews the symbolic role of the acoustic properties of voice during the communication between the secret police and the protagonist in the novel *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* (*The Fox Was Ever the Hunter*). The critic observes that the loud and deep voices of the interrogators possess acoustic properties which can be mapped onto their inhumane behavior and create correspondent images (Haupt-Cucuiu 1996: 58). While Haupt-Cucuiu makes an early contribution to the study of voice in the works of Herta Müller, her focus is on just a few aspects of character description related to voice, and she does not discuss the role of metaphor in this process.

## 4 Tactile metaphors for voice in Müller's work

The sense impressions of touch and heat must be much earlier evolutionary developments in humans than speech and are vital in daily life. O'Shaughnessy considers touch to be the most primordial sense because "it is scarcely to be distinguished from the having of a body that can act in physical space" (2000: 658), and Dunbar (2010: 260) argues that touch plays a significant role in social

bonding in primates (including humans). Drawing from Dunbar's research, Phelps (2017) comments that the use of touch for strengthening social relationships among primates appears to be thirty million years old. Fundamental to perception and evolutionarily associated with social interaction, touch provides direct bodily experience to understand voice, which can be imagined as soft, flat, cold, sharp, hard, rough, etc. Müller explores these possibilities in her descriptions of characters' speech. She creatively uses the vocabulary associated with both touch and voice, and deliberately engages tactile experience to describe voice. This is in line with the view of Steen (2008: 214) that all *deliberate metaphors* are processed metaphorically. In fact, some of the metaphors discussed in this article are highly conventional and appear to have lost their figurative meaning, but Müller consistently demonstrates that she seems to be aware of the metaphorical potential of such language. Therefore, it is justified to treat these occurrences as more than incidental. Her texts reveal an acute awareness of the relationship between figurative and literal meanings, particularly regarding tactile properties.

For instance, at one point in *The Fox Was Ever the Hunter* (*Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*), Müller presents the voice of one of the minor characters as flat and cold:

- (1) Die Stimme bleibt leise, fast flach, aber kalt. (Müller 2009a [1992]: 96)  
The voice stays quiet, almost flat, but cold.

This juxtaposition of different qualities highlights the figurative nature of the adjectives flat and cold. Flatness is a multisensory concept as it is both visual and tactile, and because it relates to the potentialities of exploring the environment. Gibbs characterizes flatness as an *affordance* that potentially engages different sensory modalities (Gibbs 2006: 64). In other words, flatness affords multisensory and motor interaction with the environment, so that, while the narrator evokes a multisensory image to describe voice, tactile experience is foregrounded in this conventional metaphor. Voice is imagined as a flat and cold object. These sensory impressions inform readers about the acoustic characteristics of voice, implying that it does not have variation in tone. Notably, these tactile qualities may convey lack of sympathy or emotion on the side of the speaker towards the listener.

Softness is another conventional way to present the auditory perception of sound. Perhaps some literary scholars would not recognize a *soft voice* as a metaphor and could argue that it activates a different meaning of the adjective *soft*. But Müller is aware of the metaphorical nature of this association. She consciously uses the tactile impression of softness in relation to voice in her works. For example, Irene, the protagonist of the novel *Reisende auf einem Bein*



(*Traveling on One Leg*), perceives a stranger's voice as soft, and here the association appears to be limited to the acoustic qualities of the sound:

- (2) Der Mann flüsterte, als Irene vorbeiging. Seine Stimme war weich. Seine Augen glänzten. Sein Blick war kalt. (Müller 2010 [1989]: 63)  
The man whispered as Irene was walking past him. His voice was soft. His eyes shone. His look was cold.

Here, the voice is soft only in its physical sound but not in the attitude of the speaker, which is expressed through the sense of temperature and contrasts with softness. There is a specific connection between softness and voice which conceptually contrasts with the larger context of the encounter and the cold look of the stranger. This contrast between softness and cold may make the metaphorical nature of the association between softness and voice more recognizable to the reader. In other words, Müller estranges the familiarity of softness as a source of meaning for voice.

Another example can be found in Müller's first major short story "Niederungen" ("Nadirs"), where the narrator's father often reminisces about the war and his comrades. In one of his drunk and nostalgic moments, he sings a song about war and death, and his voice "wird weicher" 'becomes softer' (Müller 2011 [1982]: 93). Softness here describes the change of the sound quality and, more importantly, informs the reader about the singer's emotional state. The moment when the narrator's father expresses sadness and appears most humane is conveyed through tactile experience, but the momentary change of voice does not alter the overall nature of the song. The narrator uses the same sensory medium to highlight this contrast:

- (3) Vater hat das Gesicht, hat die Augen, hat den Mund, Vater hat die Ohren voll mit seinem eigenen rauhen Lied. Vater ist ein todtrauriges Tier. (Müller 2011 [1982]: 93)  
Father's face, his eyes, his mouth, and his ears are full of his own rough song. Father is a fatally sad animal.

As can be observed, despite the moment when his voice becomes softer, the song remains rough. This juxtaposition foregrounds touch as a source of meaning for the acoustic properties of voice and its emotional context. Consequently, variations in tactile experience map onto the subjective perception of voice and on the emotional states of the characters.

Müller can also emphasize the metaphorical association between tactile experience and voice by placing its conventional expression in the direct vicinity



of the literal experience of touch. At the end of the novel *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (*The Appointment*), the unnamed narrator-protagonist encounters her mentally disordered neighbour Frau Micu, who says incomprehensible things. For a moment, the protagonist imagines her going insane. Perhaps this would allow her to avoid persecution by the totalitarian state:

- (4) jetzt aber wär ich gerne wie Frau Micu, die das Unerhörte mit weicher Stimme plappert. (Müller 2013b [1997]: 239)

but now I wanted to be like Frau Micu, babbling outrageous things in a soft voice.

Here softness is closely associated with acoustic and social qualities of voice. Softness can imply a voice lacking authority and confidence. The softness of voice resonates with the soft flesh of the apricot given to the protagonist moments before this observation. Within one short paragraph, Müller employs tactile experience first literally and then metaphorically, and hence the metaphorical nature of the association between softness and voice comes to the fore. She shows understanding that tactile perception is both a highly concrete bodily experience and simultaneously a rich source of meaning for voice.

In the following example, Müller further effectively estranges the conventional association between tactile experience and voice by attributing a negative value judgement to the generally positive image of softness. Leopold Auberg, the narrator-protagonist of the novel *Atemschaukel* (*The Hunger Angel*), has a dream in which he is a child. The dream is intermingled with the harsh reality of the Soviet labour camp barracks where he is sleeping:

- (5) Aus dem leichten Schnarchen der Schwachen, die nicht mehr tanzen gehen, höre ich meine Kinderstimme. Sie ist so samtig, dass sie mich gruselt. (Müller 2013a [2009]: 152)

Through the light snoring of the weak who no longer go dancing, I hear my childhood voice. It's so velvety that it scares/disgusts me.

In the context of the labour camp, the child's velvety voice scares and disgusts the protagonist. The narrator evokes softness to reason about the acoustic quality of the voice, but this metaphorical association has certain conventions of use where a soft voice generally produces a pleasant impression. In contrast, the protagonist feels disturbed by the experience of softness since it contradicts his environment. Life in the labour camp must be extremely rough. This discrepancy between the soft voice from the past and the rough present can be recognized as the cause of the protagonist's fear and disgust.

Another voice metaphor in Müller’s work involves the tactile perception of “roughness,” as shown in example (6). The primary meaning of the German adjective *rau* ‘rough’ is related to tactile experience, but its other established meaning is associated with the general feeling of something unpleasant without a direct link to the sense of touch. In the following passage from “*Nadirs*” (“*Niederungen*”) where village women’s voices are said to become similar to men’s while they are whispering to one another, the metaphor is most probably non-salient since it is common to use *rau* in this sense:

- (6) Vom langen Flüstern wurden ihre Stimmen rauh wie die der Männer.  
(Müller 2011 [1982]: 43)

From all that whispering, their voices became as rough as those of the men.

Here there is no extended metaphorization or context in the text which would evoke tactile experience. But knowing that Müller generally employs tactile experience to reason about voice, the primary meaning of the adjective cannot be overlooked. In *The Hunger Angel* (*Atemschaukel*), there is a more salient example of using *rau* ‘rough’ to describe metaphorically voice through touch. The inmates of the Soviet labour camp are allowed to sing and dance on Saturday evenings, and one evening the narrator remarks that the voice of the singer was

- (7) rauh wie der Sog von tiefem Wasser. (Müller 2013a [2009]: 146)  
rough like the undertow of deep water.

This unconventional comparison highlights tactile experience as a source of meaning for voice. Here the conventional association is again reinvigorated through extending the metaphor and hence activating tactile perception in the reader’s mind. In this way the author creates a complex multisensory image that relates not only to tactile experience, but also to vision, spatial orientation, and *force dynamics* (Talmy 1988). It is unclear what “*der Sog von tiefem Wasser*” ‘the undertow of deep water’ stands for, and its opacity foregrounds the metaphorical nature of the association between roughness and voice.

Not only the human voice, but other sounds too can be associated with touch in Müller’s work. For example, the narrator-protagonist of *The Hunger Angel* (*Atemschaukel*) reasons about birdsong through the sensory experience of touch. When Leopold Auberg imagines a bird made of cement in the labour camp, he compares hearing the bird sing to tactile experience:

- (8) Und auf dem Appellplatz am Brunnenrand saß abends ein Vogel aus Zement. Sein Gesang war kratzig, ein Lied aus Zement. (Müller 2013a [2009]: 40)

And in the evenings a bird made of cement sat on the edge of the well at the roll-call square. His singing was scratchy, a song made of cement.

Interestingly, this ‘scratchy’ birdsong can be implicitly related to voice because both the author and the narrator regularly anthropomorphize animals, personify physical objects, and objectify living beings. Yet first and foremost, the birdsong is metaphorically presented as a physical object made of cement. Listening to the song is conceived as touching the rough surface of the cement. Significantly, the protagonist works at the cement plant and has constant exposure to it. As a result, the metaphorical mapping between the birdsong and cement evokes multisensory images, complex sensorimotor scenarios, emotions, and social concepts. This association is not arbitrary, therefore, but highly metaphorical and well-motivated in the context of the novel.

Müller construes voice as a slippery object in her *Nobel Prize* acceptance speech “*Jedes Wort weiß etwas vom Teufelskreis*” (“Every word knows something of a vicious circle”). She recounts how a secret police officer once intimidated her; his voice “war glitschig” ‘was slippery’ (Müller 2013c [2009]: 8). This metaphorical conceptualization not only maps tactile experience onto voice but also implicitly presents hearing as a complex multisensory activity of manipulating physical objects. In the context of interrogation, the voice of the officer is imagined as a slippery object that the listener cannot control. The same multisensory metaphor is used by the narrator of *The Hunger Angel* (*Atemschaukel*), when he describes, at the end of the novel, how his partner Emma was mugged in the street on a rainy day. Emma is approached by a stranger who makes disturbing confessions about his personal life before stealing her wallet:

- (9) Dann wurde seine Stimme glitschig und brabbelte etwas. (Müller 2013a [2009]: 289)

Then his voice became slippery and babbled something.

In this case, the tactile experience of handling a slippery object is amplified by the context of the scene as it takes place in the rain. Rain can make objects wet and slippery, and the perpetrator’s voice is likewise slippery when he makes a self-critical remark that feels out of place in the conventional frame of mugging. In contrast to the previous quotation, here touch conveys incomprehensibility of the utterance. The listener cannot metaphorically grasp either the form or meaning of

the statement and conceives of the speaker's voice as slippery. Consequently, tactile experience and manipulation of physical objects not only explain the physical qualities of voice but also communicate the attitude of the listener to the speech in social and personal contexts. While both cases of the use of the adjective *glitschig* 'slippery' appear to be conventional, their textual contexts differ and allow for variation in and salience of the metaphorical understanding of voice.

Sharpness is another multisensory concept that relates to tactile and visual experience, and connects to the scenario of injury. With this concept, Müller creatively evokes physical injury to reason about language (for a discussion of injurious language in her works, see Shopin 2016). In the following passage from *The Appointment* (*Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*), the modulations of voice are vividly presented through the tactile experience associated with injury:

- (10) So ging das von vorn, wie ein Wirbel im Wasser, der Ton wurde schärfer. [...] Gift stach ihnen aus den Augen. (Müller 2013b [1997]: 185)  
It started all over again, like a vortex in the water, the tone became sharper. [...] Poison came stabbing from their eyes.

In example (10), sharpness is mapped onto the pitch of the voices of two people quarreling with each other. If it were not for the later comment about stabbing poison, the metaphorical meaning of *scharf* 'sharp' would be difficult to register since it is a rather conventional use of the adjective. However, the extended metaphor of stabbing as quarreling emphasizes tactile experience as a source of meaning for the physical qualities of voice. And once again, touch relates not only to the acoustic characteristics of speech but also to the message and its influence upon the listeners. The character's voice is presented as sharp due to the aggression and animosity expressed by the speakers. Sharpness helps the reader understand the nature of the quarrel, and simulate the feeling of danger and harm inflicted by the speakers.

## 5 Conclusion

Writing about her characters' voices, Müller consciously employs tactile metaphors via such adjectives as *weich* 'soft,' *rau* 'rough,' *glitschig* 'slippery,' *scharf* 'sharp,' *samtig* 'velvety,' *kalt* 'cold,' and *flach* 'flat.' These seemingly modality-specific metaphors relate voice to more than one sensory impression. While multi-sensory perception enables the author to associate creatively her characters' voices with different sensory phenomena, it simultaneously problematizes scholarly

efforts to analyze metaphorical language and categorize figurative associations according to sensory modalities. After all, it is problematic to disentangle individual senses as represented in conventional and metaphorical language. In short, sensory metaphors are easy to experience but difficult to analyze. In Müller's literary works, tactile language for voice appears to be well-established and even conventional, but its textual context creates variations in meaning and highlights tactile experience as a source for metaphor. She thus defamiliarizes tactile language and associates voice with multiple sensory experiences.

Whereas literary critics generally agree about the opaqueness and ambiguity of Müller's texts (e.g. Haupt-Cucuiu 1996: 5; Bozzi 2005: 141), my research indicates how reliant she is on existing conventions, which express vital ideas and deliver clear messages. I agree with Yu that multisensory (synesthetic) metaphors in literature "conform to the same cognitive constraints as they do in ordinary language" (2003: 31). Müller's works can be appreciated because she presents vivid images to her readers and engages their imagination. Literature deals with human-scale categories and is directly useful to human beings: its works bring pleasure through beauty and can educate the reader. Müller achieves these goals when she uses and estranges the everyday figurative language for voice in her works. Ambiguity and vagueness are present in her writing, but her language relies on conventions. The reader can understand the text because its messages are conveyed through the conventions and established principles of natural language. The author estranges these conventions, revealing the figurative meaning of the language used to describe voice. Defamiliarizing language, Müller makes her readers think about the very medium of creation. This is in good agreement with Marven's observation that in Müller's writing "the words [...] themselves become the focus and the interest of the text" (2005: 84; see also Haupt-Cucuiu 1996: 72; Johannsen 2008: 190). Since analytical reasoning about metaphors can be problematic due to multisensory perception, Müller's works might be challenging to interpret as she focuses the reader's attention on the figurative nature of language and makes salient its tenuous yet motivated relationship with the world.

## References

- Bargh, John A., Kay L. Schwader, Sarah E. Hailey, Rebecca L. Dyer & Erica J. Boothby. 2012. Automaticity in social-cognitive processes. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 16(12). 593–605. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2012.10.002.
- Barsalou, Lawrence W. 1999. Perceptual symbol systems. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 22. 577–660.

- Beyer, Susanne von. 2012. Ich habe die Sprache gegessen”: Die Literatur-Nobelpreisträgerin Herta Müller über ihre zusammengeklebten Gedichte und über die Macht und das Versagen der Wörter. *Der Spiegel* 35. 128–132.
- Bozzi, Paola. 2005. *Der fremde Blick: Zum Werk Herta Müllers*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Bozzi, Paola. 2013. Facts, fiction, autofiction, and surfiction in Herta Müller’s work. In Bettina Brandt & Valentina Glajar (eds.), *Herta Müller: Politics and aesthetics*, 109–129. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Deroy, Ophelia, Charles Spence & Uta Noppeney. 2016. Metacognition in multisensory perception. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20(10). 736–747. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2016.08.006.
- Dunbar, Robin I. M. 2010. The social role of touch in humans and primates: Behavioural function and neurobiological mechanisms. *Neuroscience and Behavioral Reviews* 34(2). 260–268. doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2008.07.001.
- Eddy, Beverley Driver. 2013. A mutilated fox fur: Examining the contexts of Herta Müller’s imagery in *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*. In Brigid Haines & Lyn Marven (eds.), *Herta Müller*, 84–98. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fillmore, Charles J. 1982. Frame semantics. In The Linguistic Society of Korea (ed.), *Linguistics in the morning calm*, 111–137. Seoul: Hanshin.
- Forceville, Charles. 2008. Metaphor in pictures and multimodal representations. In Raymond W. Gibbs (ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought*, 462–482. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gallese, Vittorio & George Lakoff. 2005. The brain’s concepts: The role of the sensory-motor system in conceptual knowledge. *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22. 455–479. doi:10.1080/02643290442000310.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. 2006. *Embodiment and cognitive science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haines, Brigid. 1998. “Leben wir im Detail”: Herta Müller’s micro-politics of resistance. In Brigid Haines (ed.), *Herta Müller*, 109–125. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Harrar, Vanessa, Laurence R. Harris & Charles Spence. 2017. Multisensory integration is independent of perceived simultaneity. *Experimental Brain Research* 235(3). 763–775. doi:10.1007/s00221-016-4822-2.
- Haupt-Cucuiu, Herta. 1996. *Eine Poesie der Sinne: Herta Müllers “Diskurs des Alleinseins” und seine Wurzeln*. Paderborn: Igel.
- Johannsen, Anja K. 2008. *Kisten, Krypten, Labyrinth. Raumfigurationen in der Gegenwartsliteratur: W.G. Sebald, Anne Duden, Herta Müller*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Johannsen, Anja K. 2013. Osmoses: Müller’s things, bodies, and spaces. In Bettina Brandt & Valentina Glajar (eds.), *Herta Müller: Politics and aesthetics*, 207–229. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kohl, Katrin. 2013. Beyond realism: Herta Müller’s poetics. In Brigid Haines & Lyn Marven (eds.), *Herta Müller*, 16–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Köhnen, Ralph. 1997. Über Gänge. Kinästhetische Bilder in Texten Herta Müllers. In Ralph Köhnen (ed.), *Der Druck der Erfahrung treibt die Sprache in die Dichtung: Bildlichkeit in Texten Herta Müllers*, 123–138. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Kövecses, Zoltán. 2015. *Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190224868.001.0001.
- Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lakoff, George & Mark Turner. 1989. *More than cool reason: A guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Marven, Lyn. 2005. *Body and narrative in contemporary literatures in German: Herta Müller, Libuše Moníková, and Kerstin Hensel*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Müller, Herta. 2009a [1992]. *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*, 2nd edn. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Müller, Herta. 2010 [1989]. *Reisende auf einem Bein*. Munich: Carl Hanser.
- Müller, Herta. 2011 [1982]. Niederungen. In *Niederungen*, 17–104. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Müller, Herta. 2013a [2009]. *Atemschaukel*, 3rd edn. Munich: Fischer.
- Müller, Herta. 2013b [1997]. *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*, 3rd edn. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Müller, Herta. 2013c [2009]. *Jedes Wort weiß etwas vom Teufelskreis*. In *Immer derselbe Schnee und immer derselbe Onkel*, 7–22. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- O'Shaughnessy, Brian. 2000. *Consciousness and the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patrut, Iulia-Karin. 2006. *Schwarze Schwester – Teufelsjunge: Ethnizität und Geschlecht bei Paul Celan und Herta Müller*. Cologne: Böhlau.
- Phelps, Steven M. 2017. Touched. *The Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/it-takes-neuroscience-and-poetry-to-map-the-tributaries-of-touch> (accessed 15 April 2017).
- Shklovsky, Viktor. 2015 [1917]. Art, as device. Translated by Alexandra Berlina. *Poetics Today* 36(3). 151–174. doi:10.1215/03335372-3160709.
- Shopin, Pavlo. 2016. Metaphorical conceptualization of injurious and injured language in Herta Müller. *Modern Language Review* 111(4). 1068–1084. doi:10.5699/modelangrevi.111.4.1068.
- Sinha, Chris. 1999. Grounding, mapping, and acts of meaning. In Theo Janssen & Gisela Redeker (eds.), *Cognitive linguistics: Foundations, scope, and methodology*, 223–255. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Steen, Gerard. 2008. The paradox of metaphor: Why we need a three-dimensional model of metaphor. *Metaphor and Symbol* 23(4). 213–241. doi:10.1080/10926480802426753.
- Suren, Katja. 2011. *Ein Engel verkleidete sich als Engel und blieb unerkannt: Rhetoriken des Kindlichen bei Natascha Wodin, Herta Müller und Aglaja Veteranyi*. Sulzbach: Ulrike Helmer.
- Talmy, Leonard. 1988. Force dynamics in language and cognition. *Cognitive Science* 12(1). 49–100.
- Watson, Jenny. 2014. “Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold:” German as a site of fascist nostalgia and Romanian as the language of dictatorship in the work of Herta Müller. In Peter Davies & Andrea Hammel (eds.), *New literary and linguistic perspectives on the German language, national socialism, and the Shoah*, 143–158. Rochester: Camden House.
- Yu, Ning. 2003. Synesthetic metaphor: A cognitive perspective. *Journal of Literary Semantics* 32(1). 19–34. doi:10.1515/jlse.2003.001.