

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AS A COGNITIVE FOUNDATION OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract. This thesis examines the role of conceptual metaphor as a fundamental cognitive mechanism that structures the human understanding of abstract domains. Drawing on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, as well as contemporary cross-linguistic and corpus-based research, the work demonstrates how metaphor organizes reasoning, shapes emotional and temporal conceptualization, and functions in scientific and popular-science discourse. The analysis highlights the significance of embodied experience in forming conceptual mappings, revealing how cultural models and socio-historical developments influence metaphorical systems. Special attention is given to the cognitive, communicative, heuristic, and didactic functions of metaphor, alongside its methodological implications for modern linguistic research. The study underscores the centrality of metaphor in meaning construction, cultural worldview formation, and the evolution of discursive practices.

Keywords : conceptual metaphor; cognitive linguistics; embodied cognition; temporal metaphor; emotion metaphor; discourse analysis; cultural models; metaphorical mapping; scientific discourse; metaphor identification.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), formulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson at the beginning of the 1980s, radically transformed the understanding of metaphor in linguistic and philosophical thought. Prior to this development, metaphor was predominantly treated as a rhetorical ornament or an expressive device characteristic of poetic and artistic discourse. However, the cognitive turn demonstrated that metaphor operates at a far deeper level, shaping fundamental structures of human reasoning, categorization, and interpretation. Metaphor functions not at the periphery of language, but at the center of conceptual organization, providing cognitive scaffolding through which abstract domains become comprehensible. This view is supported by an extensive body of research in cognitive linguistics, discourse studies, philosophy of language, anthropology, and psychology, which has shown that metaphor permeates not only lexical expression but also mental models that govern perception and decision-making (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 3; Kövecses 2010, p. 12).

According to CMT, human cognition relies on cross-domain mappings that connect a structured, embodied source domain with a more abstract target domain. These mappings—referred to as conceptual metaphors—provide inferential patterns that speakers use to reason about phenomena that cannot be directly

perceived. The metaphor *ARGUMENT IS WAR*, for instance, is not merely a stylistic comparison but a conceptual structure that shapes how individuals approach debates: arguments have winners and losers, strategies, attacks, and defenses. Similarly, in the metaphor *TIME IS MOTION*, temporal progression is understood in terms of movement through space, allowing speakers to conceptualize time as something that can approach, recede, accelerate, or slow down. These mappings remain consistent across diverse linguistic expressions and cultures, although the specific metaphorical systems of a language community depend heavily on historical, social, and cultural conditions (Kiklewicz 2004, p. 251).

One of the most thoroughly researched domains within metaphor theory is temporality. Time, by virtue of its abstractness, necessitates metaphorical grounding. English speakers conceptualize time through models derived from embodied experience—movement, orientation, and economic value. The metaphor *TIME IS MONEY*, widely discussed in contemporary research, reflects deep-seated cultural values related to efficiency, productivity, and economic rationality. This metaphor did not emerge arbitrarily; rather, it evolved through centuries of socio-economic transformations that embedded the idea of time as a limited and valuable resource into public consciousness. Historical analyses demonstrate that metaphors of time shift alongside cultural worldviews. While pre-industrial societies conceptualized time cyclically, drawing on agricultural rhythms and natural cycles, industrial societies adopted a linear, measurable, and economically framed conceptualization (Konnova & Babenko 2019, p. 89). Furthermore, metaphors such as “looking forward to the future” or “putting the past behind” illustrate the grounding of temporal cognition in spatial orientation, which in turn arises from bodily experience—walking forward, leaving objects behind, or anticipating obstacles.

Emotions form another domain in which conceptual metaphor plays a crucial organizational role. Anger, love, fear, and jealousy—each of these experiences depends on metaphorical projections to become cognitively manageable. The metaphor “EMOTION IS FIRE”, for example, highlights the intensity and uncontrollability of emotional states. Expressions such as “burning with anger,” “explosive temper,” or “inflamed with jealousy” demonstrate how physical sensations associated with heat serve as cognitive anchors for conceptualizing internal psychological processes. This metaphor extends beyond linguistic convenience: it structures how individuals interpret emotional escalation, control, and release. When anger is conceptualized as heat, calming down becomes “cooling off,” while emotional suppression resembles “putting out flames.” These

mappings mirror embodied experience and thus provide intuitive frameworks for interpersonal communication and self-regulation (Kövecses 2010, p. 35).

Scientific and popular-scientific discourse further illustrate the versatility of conceptual metaphor. Scholars frequently use metaphor to conceptualize entities and processes that are not directly observable. Biological processes are often described through mechanical metaphors—"BODY IS A MACHINE", "CELLS ARE FACTORIES"—which help translate complex biochemical interactions into accessible conceptual models. In scientific research, such metaphors not only facilitate explanation but also guide hypothesis formation and model-building. They serve heuristic functions by enabling researchers to draw analogies, identify relationships, and make predictions. Popular-science discourse amplifies the communicative function of metaphor by simplifying abstract theoretical constructs for the general public. As demonstrated in studies of German scientific discourse, metaphors in popular-science texts possess not only explanatory but also didactic and expressive value, helping readers visualize and internalize specialized knowledge (Stepanov 2021, p. 36–37).

In recent years, advances in corpus linguistics and computational methods have opened new perspectives for metaphor research. Corpus-based studies allow scholars to track metaphorical patterns across extensive datasets, uncover emerging conceptual trends, and analyze shifts in metaphor usage across genres and historical periods. Methodologies proposed in contemporary research outline systematic approaches for identifying conceptual mappings, distinguishing between creative and conventional metaphors, and tracing the evolution of metaphorical models in discourse. These tools highlight the dynamic nature of metaphor as a cognitive and communicative phenomenon, shaped by sociocultural context, discursive practices, technological developments, and cognitive constraints (Coll-Florit & Climent 2019, p. 22).

In summary, conceptual metaphor represents one of the most powerful theoretical frameworks for understanding the interaction between language, cognition, and culture. It elucidates the mechanisms through which individuals construct meaning, interpret abstract domains, and communicate complex ideas. Metaphor organizes experiential knowledge, structures reasoning, influences emotional expression, and shapes scientific explanation. As contemporary linguistic research continues to expand across interdisciplinary boundaries, conceptual metaphor remains a central tool for analyzing how human beings conceptualize the world and how linguistic structures reflect the evolving cognitive and cultural landscape of society.

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