

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THOUGHT: METAPHOR AS A COGNITIVE MECHANISM

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Annotation: In this paper the metaphor is examined as a cognitive tool rather than a rhetorical or stylistic device. Based on conceptual metaphor theory, it looks at how abstract notions are systematically organized via cross-domain mappings founded on embodied human experience.

Key words: cognitive metaphor, cross-domain mapping, source domain, target domain, embodiment.

That metaphor was in classical linguistics a mere metaphor in literary criticism of “poetic flourish” – a decorative dimension of the vocabulary that would beautify the text for years. The paradigm in its cognitive context, however, has changed significantly. Metaphor is no longer simply a linguistic device, but a basic cognitive process shaping the manner in which we understand, reason about, and organize the physical reality around us. The Aristotelian understanding predominated over thousands of years: metaphor was an “extra” facet of language, an exception, a deviation from literal truth¹. Meanwhile the cognitive paradigm is functionalism. It claims that language is the surface projection of more profound mental operations. Metaphor is not something that we do to language; it is something we use to think. This reconceptualization is predominantly inspired by CMT (Conceptual Metaphor Theory), which has been principally developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. CMT contends that human thought is purely metaphorical and that metaphor plays a conceptual role, initially coming before and driving linguistic meaning. In this model, metaphor is not something we use infrequently in language; it’s something we live by. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature². The mental architecture is organized around systematic correspondences, often referred to as cross-domain mappings, between different conceptual domains. A fundamental element of the cognitive approach to metaphor is that abstract thought is based on embodied experience. This is precisely the role of the human brain, which, far from processing abstract concepts in a vacuum, works through known, concrete, sensorimotor experiences in order as to organize the more complex or intangible.

This is carried out through cross-domain mapping: knowledge transferred from one to another domain through projection. Source domain - an observable, embodied domain, in which the

¹ S. H. Butcher. The poetics of Aristotle. – Penn: A Penn state electronic classics series Publication, 2000. –40b

² George L, Mark J. Metaphors we live by. – Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1980. – B.3

world is lived through physical contact with our bodies (e.g. motion, space, temperature, force, containment). The target domain is an abstract domain which is less directly accessible and to which an organization (as opposed to a static description) of time, emotion, morality, reasoning, social relations is needed. Metaphorical mapping: elements relations and inferences from the source domain that are selectively used to move into the target domain. Most importantly, this mapping is partial and systematic, and it points toward certain aspects of the target while also covering up others. One example of this kind is the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY³, as applied to psychology. Here, the source domain of physical travel gives the coherent framework for understanding love as an abstract process. Correspondences include:

A starting point – the beginning of a relationship (first meeting, falling in love).

A destination – shared goals in the relationship (marriage, long-term commitment) or its end (break-up, separation).

Paths – decisions made together in the relationship (compromise, commitment, change).

Obstacles – conflicts, misunderstandings, external pressures, or emotional difficulties.

Fellow travelers – romantic partners who share the relationship experience.

Metaphor allows people to imagine love in terms of motion, direction, progress, and potential outcomes. Phrases such as *“Our relationship is at a crossroads”*, *“We’ve come a long way together”*, *“We are going in different directions”*, *“The marriage is on the rocks”*, *“It is off the truck”*, *“We are spinning our wheels”* or *“This relationship isn’t going anywhere”*⁴ are not linguistic expressions so much as they are expressions of a conceptual paradigm underlying how love is conceived as a journey.

In the theory of conceptual metaphor, LOVE IS A JOURNEY serves as a very useful generalization that structures the reception and discussion of romantic relationships. In this metaphorical system, love partners are conceptualized as travelers, traveling together across time and experience, and the love relationship is articulated as a vehicle. The quality and stability of the relationship itself may be reflected in the fact that the speed at which this vehicle can move or in the fact that it may encounter problems. Specific life purposes — marriage, commitment, partnership, shared plans, when compared to romantic partners, metaphorically placed in a way that provides the couple with a direction and intentionality. In contrast, in a love relationship what the reader sees as difficulties in progress is usually translated into issues of movement or direction: it’s a matter of delays, detours, crossroads or a breakdown. Vivid linguistic language such as *“We’re not going in the same direction”* or *“Our relationship has stalled”* or *“We’re heading toward different goals”* demonstrates how abstract, emotional matters are algorithmically transformed into concrete objects called travel. This mathematical-like mapping

³ George L, Mark J. Metaphors we live by. – Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1980. – B.44

⁴ https://youtu.be/7_cexWKE7sE?si=mT6z4wi1w5s6o9HY

of source and target domain reveals that these expressions are not simply stylistic stylizations, but rather findings of an underlying cognitive model that has individuals conceptualize the act of love as something that is dynamic and goal-focused.

To conclude, the metaphor should not just be an illustrative device of rhetoric or style, but based in a deep cognitive process that determines experience in human life and its structure, interpretation, and communication. This mental path from the abstract to the concrete and the sensory allows them to orient themselves to time, love, life, and emotion. As illustrated, among others, by love is a journey, metaphor operates at a deep cognitive level, the ability to instruct, direct and influence thought and action and shape perception and behavior, and not simply be some sort of surface linguistic ornamentation. Metaphorical mappings also have a regularity and productivity that renders them as mental constructs to structure our thoughts across cultures and discourses, from quotidian language to publicistic and academic writing. Metaphor is one of the cognitive mechanisms, therefore it provides knowledge on its association with language and thought, and reveals how humans use their embodied experience to construct these abstract realities. Thus, the analysis of metaphor is vital not only as an explanation of the construction of significance, but also of conceptual organization and the cognitive processes that underpin linguistic expression.

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