

Theoretical Foundations of the Study of Metaphors in Linguistics

ESHANOVA RAYA MUKHIYATDINOVNA
Karakalpak State University, Nukus, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article theoretically illuminates the place of metaphor in modern linguistics, as well as its cognitive, sociocultural, and semantic characteristics. The study analyses the development of cognitive linguistics and the works of scholars such as G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, R. Langacker, and Z. Kövecses, highlighting the conceptual nature of metaphor and its role in structuring human thought. The traditional (aesthetic-rhetorical) and cognitive interpretations of metaphor are studied comparatively, establishing that metaphor is not merely a figure of speech but a universal cognitive mechanism that expresses human consciousness, culture, and experience. The distinctive features of metaphor and metonymy, and their functions in meaning-making, are also explained. The practical significance of the article is to reveal the distinctive models of national thinking by analysing the manifestation of metaphor in the Karakalpak and English languages from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Keywords: Metaphor, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, linguaculture, models of thought, Lakoff, Johnson, Langacker, Kövecses, metonymy, semantic shift, conceptual domain, cultural worldview.

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive linguistics emerged in the final quarter of the 20th century, based on the idea that language is an integral part of human thought. This approach emerged in the 1970s and 1980s

as a critical response to traditional structuralism and generative grammar. Proponents of the cognitive approach interpreted language not merely as a grammatical system, but as a system of meaning related to human perception, experience, and worldview [4: 3-5]. Cognitive linguistics also seeks to answer questions about how people think, construct, and understand reality through language.

In the development of the cognitive approach, J. Lakoff, M. Johnson, R. Langacker, and C. Scholars such as R. Fillmore played an important role in the development of the cognitive approach. In J. Lakoff and M. Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), the idea was proposed that language is shaped through a system of conceptual metaphors that structure human thought. In R. Langacker's *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (1987), it is demonstrated that all of language's grammatical structures are linked to the cognitive schemas of human thought. In this approach, meaning is regarded as the central element of grammar [5: 10-13].

In modern linguistics, the cognitive approach is applied not only in lexical-semantic analysis but also in cultural and pragmatic research. As Z. Kövecses (2010) emphasises, cognitive linguistics, by taking into account human experience, one's relationship with the physical world and cultural context, helps to provide a comprehensive explanation of the semantic system of language. Thus, the cognitive approach has become the scientific basis for understanding human consciousness, culture, and worldview in linguistics [2: 5-8].

The main aim of this article is to theoretically illuminate the place of metaphor in modern linguistics, and to investigate its cognitive and sociocultural characteristics. While for a long time metaphor was interpreted solely as a literary device, today it is regarded as a universal cognitive mechanism that expresses the conceptual system in the human mind. From this perspective, the article aims to reveal the linguistic and cognitive essence of metaphor and to demonstrate its role in meaning-making and the conceptualisation of the world.

Another aim of the article is to investigate metaphor as a linking element between language and thought. This is because

humans think through language and, through thinking, construct and comprehend reality via metaphors. In this respect, the article sets out to compare traditional and cognitive approaches in linguistics and to analyse their differing aspects in explaining metaphor.

In light of these aims and theoretical issues, a range of methods was employed in the study to gain an in-depth understanding of the cognitive and linguo-cultural characteristics of metaphor. First and foremost, the main cognitive and sociocultural literature was analysed, in the process of which J. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980); the works of scholars such as R. Langacker (1987) and Z. Kövecses (2010) were given particular attention. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was conducted on their conceptual and cultural aspects, based on examples of metaphors in the Karakalpak and English languages. Furthermore, the differences between metaphor and metonymy were analysed in the classical rhetoric and semantics literature, and the cognitive function of metaphor, its conceptual domains, as well as its ontological, orientational and structural types were investigated.

In doing so, the article has been able to link theoretical knowledge with practical analysis, enabling a broad and in-depth study of metaphor in linguistics as a conceptual, cognitive and cultural phenomenon. In the next section, the methods employed in this study are described in detail.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the same time, the article examines theoretical models of metaphor based on scientific theories in cognitive linguistics particularly the ideas put forward in the works of scholars such as G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, R. Langacker and Z. Kövecses. Within the scope of this task, the conceptual structure of metaphor, its classification (ontological, orientational, structural metaphors) and its practical expressions in thought are illustrated through examples.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) became the focal point of metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics. They put forward the theory of conceptual metaphor.

According to this theory, metaphor is not merely a word or a literary expression, but is part of the conceptual system that constitutes human thought and consciousness.

In other words, to understand abstract concepts (e.g., time, life, love), people metaphorise them through concrete areas of experience. For example:

- “Life is a journey” – meaning life is like a journey or problems in life are obstacles, goals are destinations, and so on.
- “Time is money” perceiving time as an economic resource (save time, spend time, waste time).

The research findings demonstrate the main functions of metaphor in linguistics through cognitive models and conceptual metaphors. J. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) advanced the theory of conceptual metaphor, emphasising that metaphor is not merely a literary device of words or speech but an essential part of the conceptual system that structures human thought and consciousness [3: 5-7]. According to their theory, when understanding abstract concepts (e.g., time, life, love), humans metaphorise them through concrete experiences, which helps to form conceptual models in the thought process.

Furthermore, according to R. Langacker (1987), all elements of language lexicon, syntax and morphology are formed on the basis of conceptual and visual schemas in the human mind [4: 10-15]. In his theory, grammatical structures are also regarded as means of reflecting cognitive processes, meaning that every element of language is linked to the cognitive models of human thought. This aspect provides the basis for metaphor not merely as a semantic or lexical device, but as one capable of performing conceptual and cognitive functions at all levels of language.

The study concluded that metaphors in the Karakalpak and English languages are introduced as structuring mechanisms of human thought and play a significant role in shaping conceptual models based on various cultural contexts. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the cognitive and conceptual approach in explaining metaphor in linguistics.

Zoltán Kövecses further enriched the theory of cognitive metaphor and investigated its cultural characteristics. In his *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2010), he emphasises that metaphors are not only universal but also vary according to national culture and mindset.

For example, while the metaphor “time is money” is actively used in Western culture, in Eastern culture time is more often associated with “truth,” “natural flow” or “patience.” Thus, Kövecses's main idea is that cultural worldview is manifested through metaphor, and that in each language it exists as a specific cultural cognitive model [2].

The main objectives of the article are to analyse the scientific definitions of the concept of metaphor, and to reveal the cognitive characteristics of metaphors, explaining the connection between language and culture through metaphor and comparing national thinking through metaphors in the Karakalpak and English languages, thereby demonstrating that in linguistics, metaphor is not merely an artistic device but also a reflection of human consciousness, culture and cognitive worldview as a universal linguistic phenomenon.

The concept of metaphor originates from the Greek word *metaphora*, where *meta* means “through,” “transition,” “change,” and “connection,” and *phora* means “to carry,” “to transfer,” or “to move.” Thus, in its literal sense, metaphor conveys the notion of “transferring meaning from one place to another.” The concept of metaphor was first defined scientifically by Aristotle in his works *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. He asserted that metaphor is a method of expression that transfers the name of one thing to another on the basis of a similarity in meaning. Aristotle regarded metaphor as a means of embellishing speech and expressing thought more engagingly [1: 14-57].

Subsequently, definitions of metaphor developed in the fields of rhetoric and semantics. In classical linguistics, particularly in I. A. Richards's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, metaphor is explained as a relationship between two main elements – the tenor (the primary meaning) and the vehicle (the meaning conveyed through the image). According to Richards, metaphor is an active means of constructing meaning relationships in human thought and language. At the same time, until the second

half of the twentieth century, metaphor was interpreted more as an aesthetic and poetic device.

However, in the 1980s, with the development of cognitive linguistics, a new scientific approach to metaphor emerged. In G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphor is explained not merely as a word or speech embellishment, but as a cognitive structure that constitutes the human system of thought. They emphasised that through metaphor, humans comprehend abstract concepts (for example, time, life, love) by means of concrete experiences [3: 3-5].

Thus, in modern linguistics, the definition of metaphor has expanded, and its essence has begun to be regarded not only as a linguistic or literary, but also as a cognitive and cultural category. As Z. Kövecses noted, metaphor is intrinsically linked to human experience and culture, and is considered one of the universal models of meaning that constitute worldview. Therefore, the modern definition of metaphor has been accepted as “a method of understanding and organising one domain of experience in terms of another.”

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Metaphor and metonymy are the two most important methods of meaning shift in language. However, their cognitive and semantic natures are different. As J. Lakoff and M. Johnson point out, metaphor is based on understanding one domain in terms of another. For example, in the metaphor “a debate is a war”, a person perceives arguing as if it were a battle. Thus, in a metaphor, a meaning shift occurs between two domains – the source domain and the target domain – and this is dependent on the conceptual models of human thought.

Metonymy, in contrast to metaphor, relies not on similarity but on contiguity or association. As Z. Kövecses emphasises, in metonymy the shift in meaning does not occur between two domains but within a single domain [2]. For example, take the sentence ‘The White House issued a statement.’ Here, the term ‘White House’ denotes the US government. Thus, metonymy is a shift in meaning based on proximity through a relationship of

association in reality, whereas metaphor is created through a relationship of similarity.

From a cognitive perspective, metaphor allows a person to understand abstract concepts through concrete, experiential things, whereas metonymy ensures brevity and clarity in expressing or naming one concept with another. For example, in the sentence "He is reading Shakespeare," the word "Shakespeare" by metonymy denotes Shakespeare's works. Here, metonymy functions to express the whole through a particular part, while metaphor serves to depict the process of thinking and understanding.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Thus, metaphor and metonymy fulfill different functions in the semantic system of language. Metaphor primarily shapes thought, while metonymy simplifies reference and naming. They are both cognitive mechanisms that express the conceptual processes, worldview, and cultural understanding in the human mind.

The place of metaphor in thought

For a long time, metaphor was regarded solely as a literary device, that is, a means of embellishing speech and enhancing imagery. However, at the end of the 20th century, with the development of linguistics and cognitive sciences, a new perspective on the function of metaphor began to emerge. As J. Lakoff and M. Johnson emphasise in their work *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphor is not merely a poetic or rhetorical device, but an integral part of the human system of thought. They demonstrated that through metaphor, humans comprehend abstract concepts and construct them through experience [3: 3-5].

Metaphor, as a cognitive process, expresses the conceptual system in the human mind. Through metaphor, people organise their knowledge of the world and create new meanings. Metaphor also expresses a person's cultural and social consciousness. Metaphors in different cultures reflect a people's worldview, values and modes of thought. Thus, metaphor is not merely an aesthetic element of language but a universal

phenomenon that shapes a person's cognitive and cultural outlook.

The artistic or poetic approach to metaphor is based on viewing it primarily as an aesthetic device in literature and the art of speech. In this approach, metaphor is used to enhance human emotions, figurative thinking and the emotional impact of speech. It serves not only to convey information but also to evoke various images and sensibilities in the reader or listener.

In classical rhetoric and literary theory, metaphor was regarded solely as a device for embellishing speech. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defined metaphor as a primary aesthetic and semantic device of speech and demonstrated that its power lies in creating new images beyond the conventional meanings of words. From this perspective, metaphor is intrinsically linked to human thought and emotion, through which a psycho-emotional connection with the reader is established via poetry and literature.

In an artistic approach, one of the key functions of metaphor is to intensify meaning through figurative and richly lexical and syntactic structures. Metaphor transforms a simple description in speech, presenting it as a symbol and an image.

Moreover, in contemporary literary theory, artistic metaphor is also linked to human cognitive processes. As J. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) emphasise, poetic metaphor is an important means of developing human thought and enriching its abstract concepts. They emphasised not only the aesthetic but also the conceptual function of metaphor, revealing its modern scientific understanding in literature and speech.

In the cognitive approach, metaphor is regarded not merely as a literary or lexical device, but as a conceptual mechanism that expresses human thought, consciousness and worldview. As J. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) emphasise, people rely on their experience to understand and perceive abstract concepts, thereby demonstrating that metaphor plays a fundamental role in the cognitive structure of human thought.

According to cognitive metaphor theory, every metaphor comprises two primary conceptual domains the source domain and the target domain with the source domain used to illuminate the target domain. For example, in the metaphor "Time is

Money,” time (the target domain) is perceived through money (the source domain), which reflects a person's conceptual worldview and approach to life.

Moreover, the cognitive approach also examines metaphor from cultural and contextual perspectives. As Z. Kövecses (2010) emphasises, metaphors may be used differently across cultures to express the same concept, which demonstrates the connection between metaphor, human worldview and cultural cognition. For example, while in Western culture time is widely understood as an economic resource, in other cultures it may be seen as a natural flow or associated with patience.

Finally, in the cognitive approach, metaphor is considered a primary means of structuring human thought, understanding abstract concepts through concrete experiences, and shaping worldviews. Thus, metaphor not only fulfils the lexical or literary function of language, but also plays a crucial role in expressing human consciousness and cultural concepts.

In a linguo-cultural approach, metaphor is regarded not only as an important means of expressing the semantic or aesthetic functions of language, but also as a significant vehicle for conveying a nation's cultural and traditional values. As Z. Kövecses (2010) emphasises, metaphors reflect each nation's worldview, beliefs and cultural mindset. In this approach, metaphors are intended to allow the language user to express their national culture and shared values.

For example, in the Karakalpak language, the phrase *Yurakyorug'i* depicts the purity and sincerity of a person's heart, where the metaphor encompasses national values and spiritual concepts.

The linguocultural approach is also of great importance in the fields of linguistics and ethnolinguistics. As scholars have emphasised, metaphors reveal a nation's cultural identity and social norms. For example, cultural symbols, customs and values are expressed in speech through metaphor [6]. Here, metaphor serves not only an aesthetic or conceptual function but also as a factor reflecting the nation's cognitive and cultural map.

Thus, in the linguocultural approach, metaphor is regarded as a universal means that integrates a person's cognitive processes,

worldview and national culture. Through it, the language user manifests their cultural mindset, traditions and values in their speech, which in linguistics allows the study of metaphor not only as an aesthetic but also as a cultural phenomenon.

Adequately conveying metaphor in translation has always been a persistent problem. This is because each language has its own conceptual and cultural map, and metaphor is tied to its symbolism, semantics and idiomatic phraseology. Therefore, a metaphor that is natural and comprehensible in one language may lose its meaning or aesthetic impact when directly applied in another.

According to the cognitive approach of J. Lakoff and M. Johnson, metaphor is expressed not only through the lexical elements of a language but also through human thought and worldview. Therefore, a literal translation of a metaphor in translation often leads to a loss of meaning. For example, the English metaphor *Time is Money* may not fully convey its meaning and context when directly translated into Karakalpak or Uzbek, since in those cultures the economic concept of time is interpreted differently.

To solve the metaphor problem in translation, scholars propose two main approaches. The first is to find an adequate metaphor, that is, to seek in the translation a fitting metaphor that corresponds to a given conceptual domain. The second is to explain with a gloss, that is, to add an extra note in the translation clarifying the meaning of the metaphor. Both approaches serve to preserve the accuracy and aesthetic impact of the translation.

Thus, the problem of metaphor in translation is considered an important part of linguistics and cognitive analysis. It requires the adequate and effective expression of metaphor in different languages, taking into account cultural and cognitive differences. This issue is of particular importance in both modern translation studies and linguoculture studies.

To view metaphor as a conceptual model means to see it not merely as a word or literary device in language, but as a cognitive structure that constitutes human thought. As J. Lakoff and M. Johnson [3] emphasise, humans perceive abstract concepts through concrete and experiential terms, thereby making metaphor the

primary conceptual mechanism that shapes human thought. For example, the metaphor 'Time is Money' allows the concept of time to be planned and perceived like money, thereby influencing a person's worldview and cognitive model.

Thus, as a conceptual model, metaphor is of great importance as a means of structuring the processes of human thought and worldview.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as the primary means by which the human mind comprehends and perceives abstract concepts. As J. Lakoff & M. Johnson emphasise, humans perceive abstract concepts through experiential and concrete entities, thereby enabling the structuring of intended abstract concepts via metaphor.

Metaphors are classified along various dimensions. One of the most widespread classifications in cognitive linguistics is that proposed by Z. Kövecses, in which metaphors are categorised as follows:

1. **Ontological metaphors:** describe abstract concepts as objects, persons or substances. For example, "Anger is a heated fluid in a container" – perceiving anger as a hot liquid in a vessel
2. **Oriental metaphors:** depict concepts in terms of location and movement. For example, "Happy is up/Sad is down" – happiness is perceived as high, sadness as low
3. **Structural metaphors:** serve to construct a concept through another concept and to reveal its structure. For example, "Argument is war" – understanding an argument through the structure of a battle.

These classifications clearly demonstrate the cognitive function of metaphor and how it structures abstract concepts in the human mind.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in linguistics, metaphor occupies a special place not only as a literary device but also as a conceptual and

cognitive model of human thought. Through it, humans perceive abstract concepts via concrete and experiential imagery, reveal the emotional and figurative dimensions of speech, and it also serves as a universal mechanism reflecting conceptual processes across different languages.

In conclusion, cognitive and cultural approaches are of great importance in the in-depth study of metaphor. While the cognitive approach helps to structure abstract concepts in the human mind, the cultural approach allows for the reflection of each nation's traditions, values, and worldview. Thus, metaphor is regarded in linguistics as a fundamental phenomenon from conceptual, cognitive, and cultural perspectives, opening up broad possibilities for future research.

REFERENCES

1. Aristotle. 2001. *Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. New York: Dover Publications.
2. Kövecses, Z. 2010. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Langacker, R. W. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
5. ———. 1991. *Concept, Image, and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar*. Berlin: Moutonde Gruyter.
6. Yu, N. 1998. *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: A Perspective from Chinese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

ESHANOVA RAYA MUKHIYATDINOVNA
KARAKALPAK STATE UNIVERSITY,
NUKUS, UZBEKISTAN.