

The Conceptual Classification of Cognitive Metaphors and their Linguocultural Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the conceptual classification of cognitive metaphors and their linguocultural interpretations. Through a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek metaphorical expressions, it argues that metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but essential mechanisms of human cognition. Metaphors shape the way people conceptualize abstract notions such as time, emotion, and thought by mapping them onto more concrete, embodied experiences. The study emphasizes that metaphorical thinking is deeply rooted in both physical interactions with the world and culturally conditioned worldviews. While some metaphorical models—such as spatial oppositions (e.g., up-down, in-out)—are considered universal, their linguistic realizations, meanings, and cognitive salience differ significantly across cultures. The article explores this variation by analyzing conceptual metaphors within English and Uzbek, demonstrating how cultural values, traditions, and linguistic structures influence metaphor formation and interpretation. Special attention is given to orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors, as introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, whose theoretical framework underpins the analysis.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, typology, structural metaphor, universal character, physical experience, cultural experience, linguocultural feature.

INTRODUCTION

In modern linguistics, the reflection of human cognition in language, as well as the processes of perceiving and expressing the world through language, have become central topics of scholarly discussion. In particular, the field of cognitive linguistics proposes studying language not merely as a communicative tool but as a reflection of conceptual structures within human consciousness. Within this framework, metaphors are interpreted not simply as artistic embellishments but as cognitive phenomena that play a central role in shaping worldview and conceptual understanding. Since the 1970s, the development of cognitive science has led to a new perspective on metaphor, recognizing it as a crucial component of both linguistic and mental processes. The significance of metaphor in cognitive science lies in its function as a fundamental mechanism of knowledge, with its linguistic expressions reflecting mental structures in the human mind.

The work *Metaphors We Live By* by American scholars George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980) marked a turning point in the development of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science as a whole. They laid the foundation for the theory of cognitive metaphors by conceptualizing metaphor not merely as a stylistic device, but as a fundamental cognitive structure. The term “conceptual metaphor” was first introduced by George Lakoff in the 1980 publication of *Metaphors We Live By*. According to the authors, a conceptual metaphor is not simply a figure of speech; it is a mode of thinking and reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson 2004). “It is difficult to think without these metaphors, and when we talk about putting aside metaphors to see more clearly, we are still in the metaphor” (Keromnes 2014: 3). This recognition has elevated metaphor to a key object of study in modern linguistics, particularly in examining the interplay between language and psychological processes. As Russian linguists have noted, metaphor has been given “a new life” as a linguistic phenomenon. (Osokina, Karpukhina & Savochkina 2021: 423).

Moreover, since each language and culture embodies a unique worldview, the interpretation of metaphors is inherently tied to linguocultural features. From this perspective, not only the

classification of cognitive metaphors, but also their perception and application across different cultural contexts is of particular importance. This article analyzes the conceptual classification of cognitive metaphors and examines their linguocultural characteristics in depth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The object of this study is the typology of conceptual metaphors developed in George Lakoff & Mark Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*, as well as the theoretical works and scholarly research on metaphor by linguists worldwide. These theoretical sources serve to identify the conceptual properties of metaphors and to scientifically substantiate their types and functional roles. Through selected examples, the study illustrates the linguocultural interpretation of orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors. Based on the analysis, English-language metaphors were compared with those in other languages, allowing for the identification of both universal and culturally specific features.

In analyzing the conceptual classification of cognitive metaphors and interpreting them from a linguocultural perspective, the study employed cognitive and linguocultural analysis methods. Additionally, comparative analysis was used to examine English conceptual metaphors alongside metaphorical models from other languages. This methodological approach allowed for the identification of both universal and culture-specific aspects of metaphors, as well as differences in expression and semantics across various cultural contexts. Lexical-semantic analysis was also applied to explore the denotative and connotative meanings of the words within metaphorical structures.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The emergence of conceptual metaphor studies in global linguistics has stimulated research into the processes of human cognition. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as A. Ortony, R. Harris, R. Reynolds (Ortony, Reynolds & Arter 1978:

919-943), A. Healy, and others explored various aspects of metaphor. A. Ortony focused primarily on the role of similarity in metaphor, particularly its function in analogical thinking. (Ortony 1993) R. Harris, on the other hand, proposed that metaphor comprehension involves a two-stage process: first, understanding the literal meaning of a word, and second, using that meaning to construct a metaphorical interpretation (Harris 1976).

The conceptual theory of metaphor was developed by American scholars George Lakoff & Mark Johnson. In their seminal work, they argue that a conceptual metaphor is not merely a stylistic device, but a fundamental mode of thinking and reasoning. George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, as the founders of this theory, were the first to propose a typology of conceptual metaphors, identifying three primary types: Orientational metaphors; ontological metaphors and structural metaphors.

Orientational metaphors, which have a fundamental structure in the form of spatial images, have great potential for the analysis of human cognitions, that is, mental operations that serve and accompany the perception of the surrounding world. As George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980) point out: "There is another kind of metaphorical concept, one that does not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. We will call these orientational metaphors, since most of them have to do with spatialorientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central – peripheral (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 14). Metaphors based on spatial expressions have a fundamental structure that provides significant potential for analyzing human cognition– specifically, the mental processes that accompany and shape our perception of the surrounding world. This type of metaphor represents not individual concepts, but a multitude of conceptual spheres by which a person thinks and lives (Dubin 2021).

Orientational metaphors tend to have a more universal nature, as they are primarily associated with the human body and its orientation in physical space. In this context, the concept of physical norm becomes relevant: both normal and abnormal positions of the human body, as well as its movements, are conceptualized (Mishankina 2010: 45).

According to French researcher Yvon Keromnes, orientational metaphors are based on simple and relatively uncomplicated experiences, which makes the process of semantic transfer occur more easily (Keromnes 2014: 8). However, the process of transferring a particular term to another conceptual category is not arbitrary; it is grounded in years of experience, logical associations, and, most importantly, a clearly defined purpose (Rofieva 2020: 49). As George Lakoff & Mark Johnson emphasize: “Such metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary. They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience” (Lakoff & Johnson 1890: 14).

Though the polar oppositions up-down, in-out, etc., are physical in nature, the orientational metaphors based on them can vary from culture to culture. For example, in some cultures, the concept of “up” is associated with power and success, while in others it may carry the opposite meaning. The “front-back” orientational metaphor has also contributed over centuries to the perception of time as a spatial direction in various cultures. As in many other societies, in Uzbek culture as well, the future is conceptualized as being in front, and the past as behind. However, in some cultures, even when the future is “in front” and the past is “behind,” speakers of a language may place greater focus and attention on the past, the elderly, and national traditions formed over centuries, thus reversing the expected conceptual emphasis. In Moroccan and Chinese worldviews, by contrast, a conceptual mapping emerges where the future is behind and the past is in front. This illustrates that language and our perception of the world are deeply intertwined with our lived experiences and national cultural frameworks (De la Fuente, Santiago, Román, Dumitrache & Casasanto 2014).

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson analyzed the “up-down” lexical pair, which expresses spatial oppositions, in relation to certain human emotions. They demonstrated this through the conceptual contrast between happiness (“happy”) and sadness (“sad”), formulating the model “Happy is up”; “Sad is down”. These orientational metaphors do not refer to physical location, but rather indicate direction, showing how such spatial terms structure people’s conceptual worldview. Orientational

metaphors of the “up-down” type are based on the notion that the feeling of happiness is comparable to upward movement or flight, while the feeling of unhappiness is associated with being pressed down to the ground or falling (“in low spirits”) (Egorova & Kalashnikova 2016).

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson illustrate the “Happy is up”; “Sad is down” orientational metaphors with the following examples commonly found in English-speaking culture:

- *I'm feeling up today*
- *I'm feeling up*
- That *boosted* my spirits
- My spirits *rose*
- *I'm depressed*
- He's really *low* these days
- I *fell* into a depression
- My spirits *sank*

In Uzbek culture, as in English and other cultures, the concepts of “happiness” and “sadness” are often reflected in orientational metaphors based on spatial relationships such as “up” and “down” which correspond to physical movements of the human body.

- His words *cheered me up*.
- I'm in *seventh heaven*.

Below is an example from the Uzbek writer Abdulhamid Cho'lpon's novel *Night and Day*.

- Were you happy? Really?
- I was *over the moon!* “*Night and Day*”. (Chulpon 2019: 214)

Ontological metaphors are also grounded in physical objects, particularly in a person's individual experiences related to the human body. Ontological metaphors involve interpreting events, actions, emotions, and other abstract phenomena as concrete objects or substances.

Names referring to activities, events, emotions, and thoughts are represented as if they possess material properties, with labels

from one category being transferred to another. Ontological metaphors are based on the projection of the properties of objects of the surrounding reality (fragility, hardness, etc.) onto abstract entities, for example, the mind, emotions, morality, etc (Egorova & Kalashnikova 2016: 193).

This transfer is based on attributing the characteristics of physical objects – such as fragility or hardness – to abstract concepts like the mind, emotions, morality, and so on. Russian linguists emphasize that ontological metaphors emerge earlier in a person's conceptual system compared to structural metaphors. This is because ontological metaphors are formed through emotional experience, whereas structural metaphors are primarily a product of the culture in which a person develops. "Ontological metaphors serve as "building material" for structural metaphors" (Budaev & Chudinov 2021: 32).

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson themselves have emphasized that treating intangible entities as concrete objects or subjects does not necessarily lead to a complete or perfect understanding. (Lakoff & Johnson 2004: 52). However, he further elaborated on ontological metaphors using the following examples:

- The mind is a machine.
- The mind is a brittle object.
- My mind just isn't *operating* today.
- I'm a little *rusty* today.
- Her ego is very *fragile*.
- He *broke* under cross-examination.
- The experience *shattered* him.

The metaphor "The Mind is a Brittle Object" is not particularly rich. It primarily allows us to speak about a person's emotional state. Nevertheless, scholars point out that certain aspects of inner human experience can be found in both this and related metaphors, as illustrated by the following examples.

- He *broke down*.
- He *cracked up*.

Metaphors based on the “The mind is a brittle object” model are also an integral part of how the inner world of a person is conceptualized in our culture.

According to American scholars, “Personification represents a general category that encompasses a wide range of metaphors, each of which is based on a specific human trait or mode of perception. What unites them is that they are extensions of ontological metaphors and enable us to make sense of events by humanizing them— that is, by interpreting them in terms we understand through our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics (Lakoff & Johnson 2004: 60).

“Structural metaphors allow us to do much more than just orient concepts, refer to them, quantify them, etc., as we do with simple orientational and ontological metaphors; they allow us, in addition, to use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 61). This is why they differ from other types of metaphors by offering a broader and more comprehensive scope. Structural metaphors allow us to use a highly structured and well-defined concept to construct the meaning of another. Moreover, like other types of metaphors, structural metaphors are also grounded in systematic connections between experiences that arise from human interaction with the world.

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson have demonstrated that, like orientational and ontological metaphors, structural metaphors also originate from systematic relationships between experiences internalized through cultural practices. They substantiate this claim using the source of the “Rational argument is war” metaphor. This metaphor enables the conceptualization of the concept “rational argument” in more accessible and comprehensible terms – specifically through the lens of physical conflict.

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson have illustrated how everyday structural metaphors can reveal the metaphorical nature of concepts that structure human daily activity, using the modern English metaphor “Time is money” as an example. Thinking of “Time is money” allows us to conceptualize the abstract notion of time as a tangible resource – something that can be saved, spent, lost, given to others, or even stolen.

Time is money

- You're wasting my time.
- This gadget will save you hours.
- I don't have the time to give you.
- I've invested a lot of time in her.

In European culture, the ideas that “time is a valuable commodity” and “time is a limited resource used to achieve goals” are reflected in the way modern Western culture typically measures the concept of labor by the amount of time spent on it. From a linguistic perspective, these subcategorical relationships give rise to the following metaphorical mappings: from the metaphor “time is money” emerges the metaphor “time is a limited resource,” which in turn leads to the metaphor “time is a valuable object.”

Such metaphorically expressed words and phrases can vary significantly across different languages. For example, the cognitive metaphor “expenditure of time” in English is realized as “filling your time” in Hungarian (Kövecses 2010: 198).

In Uzbek culture as well, if we examine everyday expressions such as “You stole my time,” “You need to save your time,” “I lost an hour translating this text,” “Even after all the time I gave you, you couldn't finish the task,” or “No matter what, you must find the time,” we can observe how the abstract concept of “time” is understood metaphorically as a tangible object. These examples align with the cognitive metaphor “time is money”, where time can be saved, stolen, lost, given to others, or found – just like a material resource.

CONCLUSIONS

In contemporary global linguistics, there is a growing interest in exploring the features of metaphor as they relate to human cognition and the human factor. This trend highlights the increasing importance of language and thought in the formation of new ideas linked to cognitive processes within the human mind. These issues are particularly evident in the linguo-cognitive and linguo-cultural aspects of languages. In linguistics at the end of the 20th century, it became possible to accept the following postulate,

which stems from the achievements of both Russian and foreign scholars: language is not only connected with culture; it grows out of it and expresses it (Maslova 2001: 9).

The orientational, structural, and ontological types of conceptual metaphors serve as mechanisms for understanding human interaction with the surrounding environment and as methods for mentally organizing acquired knowledge. As a result of the conceptual classification of cognitive metaphors and their linguo-cultural interpretation, the following conclusions have been drawn:

orientational metaphors are not arbitrary; they are based on people's physical and cultural experiences; orientational metaphors tend to have a more universal character; because they are grounded in simple and relatively uncomplex experiences, the process of meaning transfer in orientational metaphors occurs more easily; although basic spatial orientations exist across all cultures, the methods of orientation and their hierarchical structures vary from one culture to another; an ontological metaphor is a type of conceptual metaphor that allows abstract concepts to be understood as if they were entities; ontological metaphors represent a way of interpreting phenomena, actions, emotions, and other abstract notions as objects or substances; structural metaphors are grounded in systematic correlations within our experience. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 61)

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