

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY AND EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the theory of conceptual metaphor and its role in everyday language within the framework of cognitive linguistics. The study is based on the idea that metaphor is not only a stylistic device used in literature, but also a fundamental mechanism of human thought and communication. Drawing on the theories developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the article analyzes how people understand abstract concepts through more concrete and familiar experiences. Particular attention is given to conceptual metaphors such as “TIME IS MONEY,” “ARGUMENT IS WAR,” and “LIFE IS A JOURNEY,” which frequently appear in everyday speech.

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor theory, cognitive linguistics, everyday language, metaphor, cognition, language and thought, discourse analysis.*

Research methods. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method within the framework of cognitive linguistics to analyze the role of conceptual metaphors in everyday language. The research is primarily based on the theoretical approaches developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. The data for the research consist of metaphorical expressions collected from everyday English conversations, media language, and common written texts. Expressions containing metaphorical meaning were identified and categorized according to their conceptual domains. Particular attention was paid to conceptual metaphors such as “TIME IS MONEY,” “LIFE IS A JOURNEY,” and “ARGUMENT IS WAR.” The analysis was conducted using semantic and cognitive approaches. First, metaphorical expressions were identified in the selected examples. Second, the source domain and target domain of each metaphor were examined. Finally, the cognitive functions of these metaphors were interpreted to determine how they shape human understanding and communication.

Results and discussion. The results of the study demonstrate that conceptual metaphors are deeply embedded in everyday language and play a crucial role in shaping human thought. The analysis revealed that many ordinary expressions used in daily communication are based on underlying metaphorical concepts.

Language is one of the most important tools humans use to understand and describe the world. For a long time, metaphors were considered only literary or poetic devices used to make speech more beautiful and expressive. However, the American cognitive linguist George Lakoff changed this traditional understanding through his theory of conceptual metaphor. Together with Mark Johnson, Lakoff introduced the idea that metaphor is not simply a feature of language but a fundamental mechanism of human thought. Their influential book *Metaphors We Live By* demonstrated that people think metaphorically in everyday life, often without realizing it.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CM Theory) explains how abstract ideas are understood through concrete experiences. Everyday expressions such as “time is running out,” “I defended my argument,” or “she is at the peak of her career” reveal that human thinking is deeply metaphorical. Metaphors shape not only language but also perception, reasoning, emotions, and social interaction. Therefore, CM Theory provides an important framework for understanding the connection between language and cognition.

Conceptual metaphor theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory argues that people understand abstract concepts through more familiar and physical experiences. In this theory, a metaphor consists of two domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain is usually concrete and based on bodily or everyday experience, while the target domain is more abstract. Human beings transfer knowledge from the source domain to the target domain in order to understand difficult or invisible concepts.

One of the most famous examples presented by Lakoff is the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. In everyday language, people often use expressions connected with conflict and battle when discussing arguments. For example, people say:

- “He attacked my argument.”
- “She defended her point.”
- “I won the debate.”

These expressions show that arguments are commonly understood through the concept of war. Although no physical battle occurs, speakers unconsciously structure arguments as conflicts between opponents.

Another common conceptual metaphor is TIME IS MONEY. Modern societies treat time as a valuable resource, and this understanding appears clearly in language. People say:

- “You are wasting my time.”
- “I spent two hours on homework.”

- “That mistake cost me a day.”

In these examples, time is understood through economic terms such as spending, saving, wasting, and costing. This metaphor reflects the values of industrial and capitalist societies, where time is connected with productivity and efficiency.

Conceptual metaphors in everyday language

Conceptual metaphors are present in almost every area of daily communication. People use them automatically in conversations, media, education, and politics. Since metaphors influence thinking, they also shape how people experience reality.

One common metaphor is HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN. Emotional states are understood through spatial orientation. For example, people say:

- “I’m feeling up today.”
- “Her mood rose after the good news.”
- “He feels low.”

These expressions show how physical experiences influence emotional understanding. Positive emotions are associated with upward movement, while negative emotions are connected with downward movement.

Another important metaphor is LOVE IS A JOURNEY. Romantic relationships are frequently described using the language of travel and movement. Examples include:

- “Their relationship is at a crossroads.”
- “We are going in different directions.”
- “Their marriage has hit a dead end.”

Here, love is conceptualized as a journey with paths, destinations, obstacles, and directions. Such metaphors help people describe complex emotional experiences in understandable terms.

Conceptual metaphors are also visible in education and learning. The metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD appears in expressions such as:

- “That’s hard to digest.”
- “I’m hungry for knowledge.”
- “She gave us food for thought.”

These examples demonstrate how intellectual activity is understood through eating and digestion. Abstract thinking becomes easier to discuss because it is connected with physical experience.

Embodiment and human cognition

An important aspect of CM Theory is the idea of embodied cognition. Lakoff argues that human thought is shaped by the body and physical experience. People understand the world through movement, vision, touch, balance, and interaction with

the environment. Therefore, language reflects bodily experience. For instance, people associate importance with size and height. Expressions such as “a big decision” or “high status” indicate that physical dimensions influence abstract understanding. Similarly, morality is often connected with cleanliness. People say someone has a “clean record” or “dirty intentions.” These examples suggest that abstract concepts are rooted in sensory and physical experiences. Embodied cognition challenges the traditional view that thinking is purely rational and independent from the body. According to Lakoff, reason itself is influenced by metaphorical structures developed through everyday life.

The influence of CM theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory has influenced many academic fields beyond linguistics. In psychology, researchers study how metaphors affect memory, emotions, and decision-making. In education, teachers use metaphors to explain difficult concepts. In literature, critics analyze how writers use metaphorical structures to create meaning. CM Theory has also become important in political discourse. Lakoff argues that political ideas are shaped through metaphorical framing. For example, nations are often described as families, and political leaders are represented as parents or protectors. Such metaphors influence public opinion and political ideology. Media and advertising also rely heavily on conceptual metaphors. Advertisements frequently connect products with ideas such as freedom, power, success, or happiness. These metaphorical associations shape consumer behavior and cultural values.

Criticism of conceptual metaphor theory

Although CM Theory has been highly influential, it has also received criticism. Some scholars argue that Lakoff exaggerates the role of metaphor in cognition. They claim that not all thinking is metaphorical and that some expressions may simply be conventional language patterns. Other researchers emphasize cultural differences. Certain metaphors may exist in one language but not in another. For example, metaphors related to time, emotions, or morality can vary significantly across cultures. Therefore, critics argue that conceptual metaphors are not always universal. In addition, some linguists question how conceptual metaphors can be scientifically tested. Since metaphors often operate unconsciously, it can be difficult to prove exactly how they influence thought and behavior. Despite these criticisms, CM Theory remains one of the most important developments in modern cognitive linguistics.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirm that metaphor is not merely a decorative element of language but a cognitive mechanism that influences perception, reasoning, and communication. The research supports the view that conceptual metaphors organize human experience and contribute significantly to meaning construction in everyday language.

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