



THE INTERFACE BETWEEN COGNITIVE METAPHOR AND ENANTIOSEMY: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Sarvar Hafizov Boborajab ugli

Department of Foreign Language and Literature
for Lower Courses, Denov Institute of Entrepreneurship
and Pedagogy, Denov, Uzbekistan

E-mail: sarvarhafizov4@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1299-205X>

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theoretical relationship between cognitive (conceptual) metaphor and enantiosemy, two phenomena that are frequently confused by students of cognitive semantics because both involve a single form carrying more than one, seemingly incompatible, meaning. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and recent corpus-based work on enantiosemy, the paper argues that the two categories are cognitively related but structurally and functionally distinct: metaphor is a mapping mechanism that generates new meaning across conceptual domains, whereas enantiosemy is a semantic outcome - the coexistence of opposite senses within one lexical unit - that can, among other routes, arise through metaphorical extension. The paper outlines the shared cognitive basis of both phenomena, then specifies the criteria that separate them: directionality, domain structure, disambiguation mechanism, and diachronic status.

Introduction

Cognitive metaphor and enantiosemy are two of the phenomena in which students of semantics most often lose their footing, precisely because both appear, on the surface, to violate the assumption that a linguistic sign has a stable, unified meaning. A metaphor lets one concept be understood partly in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), while an enantiosemic word simultaneously houses two meanings that stand in a relation of semantic opposition (Klimenko & Halikova, 2019). The temptation to treat the two as variants of the same phenomenon is understandable, since both rest on the human capacity to hold two conceptual representations in tension within a single sign. This paper sets out to separate the two categories analytically: to show where their cognitive foundations overlap, and where their linguistic behaviour diverges.

Conceptual metaphor: A cross-domain mapping

Since Lakoff and Johnson's foundational work, metaphor has been treated not as a decorative feature of language but as a basic mechanism of thought: an asymmetric mapping of structure from a concrete, well-understood source domain onto a more abstract target

domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Expressions such as "time is money" or "argument is war" are surface manifestations of stable conceptual mappings that organize how a speech community reasons about abstract experience (Kövecses, 2010). Three features of this mechanism matter for the present comparison. First, the mapping is directional: source-domain structure is projected onto the target domain, and not vice versa. Second, the two domains involved are conceptually distinct - one is not merely a variant sense of the other, but an entire structured area of experience. Third, metaphor is fundamentally productive: a single conceptual metaphor generates an open-ended family of linguistic expressions, and new instances can be coined on the same underlying pattern.

Enantiosemy: Opposition within a single sign

Enantiosemy is standardly defined as a case of polysemy in which one sense of a lexical unit is, in some respect, the opposite of another sense of the same unit (Matthews, 2007), so that a single form such as English "screen" can mean either "to show" or "to conceal" depending on context. Shmelev stresses that enantiosemy should not be dismissed as a marginal curiosity: it is a regular phenomenon governed by the general principles of human cognition and communication (as discussed in Klimenko & Halikova, 2019). Novikov and other Slavic semanticists trace enantiosemic pairs to inverse semantic processes such as broadening, narrowing, or the reanalysis of a scene from an opposite participant role - for instance, a word denoting a host can drift toward denoting a guest, since both are simply participants viewed from different vantage points within the same event (as surveyed in Klimenko & Halikova, 2019). Recent corpus-based research on English and Uzbek confirms that enantiosemy is not random noise but arises through systematic mechanisms, among them metaphorical extension, contextual reinterpretation, and pragmatic shift, although English and Uzbek differ in how far the phenomenon penetrates the lexicon versus the phraseological level (Rustamova, 2026). Because the two opposed senses share one phonological form, resolving which sense is intended depends almost entirely on context; outside a disambiguating context the word is genuinely ambiguous rather than vague.

Points of convergence

The two phenomena meet at three points. First, both rest on the same cognitive capacity for conceptual blending - the ability to hold two representations active under a single sign and to select between them contextually. Second, metaphor can itself serve as a historical source of enantiosemy: when a word's core sense is metaphorically extended in two divergent directions at once, the two resulting senses can end up in opposition, which is exactly the mechanism of metaphorical extension identified in recent corpus work as one route into enantiosemy (Rustamova, 2026). Third, both phenomena are resolved by the hearer through the same interpretive tool: the immediate linguistic and situational context supplies the cue that lets a hearer select the intended sense or mapping, so neither metaphor nor enantiosemy can, in general, be disambiguated from the word form alone.

Points of divergence

Despite this shared cognitive ground, metaphor and enantiosemy differ in kind rather than degree. Metaphor is a generative process: it produces new meaning by importing the structure of one domain into another, and it is inherently productive, licensing indefinitely many new expressions from one underlying mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses,

2010). Enantiosemy, by contrast, is a static lexical outcome - a fixed, closed pair of opposed senses attached to one form, which is not itself generative in the way a conceptual metaphor is (Matthews, 2007). Metaphor is cross-domain by definition, connecting two structurally distinct areas of experience; enantiosemy is intra-domain, since its two senses belong to the same conceptual field and are opposed rather than merely different (Klimenko & Halikova, 2019). Metaphorical mapping is directional, projecting from source to target, whereas the two senses of an enantioseme are not ranked in this way; neither sense is conceptually prior to the other in synchronic use, even though one may be historically older. Finally, metaphor is typically classified as a matter of polysemy shading into figurative extension, while enantiosemy occupies a genuinely contested position at the intersection of polysemy, antonymy, and homonymy, and linguists still disagree about which category it ultimately belongs to (Ashurova & Sultonova, 2019; Klimenko & Halikova, 2019).

Conclusion

Cognitive metaphor and enantiosemy share a common root in the human capacity to activate more than one conceptual representation under a single sign, and metaphorical extension is one documented pathway by which enantiosemic oppositions come into being historically. Yet the two remain analytically distinct: metaphor is a directional, cross-domain, productive mapping mechanism, while enantiosemy is a bounded, intra-domain, contextually resolved lexical state. Recognizing this distinction - rather than collapsing the two under the loose label of "double meaning" - is precisely the point at which students of cognitive semantics most often go astray, and it is the distinction that allows the two phenomena to be studied as complementary rather than identical objects of inquiry.

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