



THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE OF METAPHORS IN ENGLISH FROM A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE AND THEIR CULTURAL DETERMINATION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the conceptual structure of metaphors in the English language from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, with particular emphasis on their cultural determination. Within the framework of cognitive metaphor theory, especially the works of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, metaphor is viewed not merely as a stylistic device, but as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals conceptualize abstract experiences. The study explores how conceptual metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, and LIFE IS A JOURNEY reflect culturally embedded patterns of thought and social values prevalent in English-speaking communities. By analyzing metaphorical mappings between source and target domains, the article demonstrates that metaphors are systematically motivated by embodied experience and cultural context. Furthermore, the research highlights the role of culture in shaping metaphorical models, showing that while some conceptual metaphors have universal cognitive foundations, others are culture-specific and linguistically conventionalized. The findings underscore the importance of integrating cognitive and cultural approaches in metaphor studies, particularly for cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and foreign language teaching. The article contributes to a deeper understanding of how language, cognition, and culture interact in the formation of metaphorical meaning in English..

Introduction

In recent decades, metaphor has become one of the central objects of study in cognitive linguistics, as scholars increasingly recognize its fundamental role in human thought and conceptualization. Traditionally, metaphor was treated as a purely rhetorical or stylistic device, mainly associated with poetic or figurative language. However, the emergence of cognitive linguistics in the late twentieth century radically transformed this view by

demonstrating that metaphor is not limited to language alone but constitutes a basic mechanism of human cognition. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action”¹. This paradigm shift laid the foundation for the theory of conceptual metaphor, which argues that abstract concepts are systematically understood through more concrete and embodied experiences.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphors are structured through stable correspondences, or mappings, between a source domain and a target domain. These mappings are not arbitrary; rather, they are grounded in bodily experience and interaction with the physical and social environment². For instance, abstract notions such as time, emotions, or social relations are commonly conceptualized using spatial, physical, or movement-based domains. In English, expressions like *spend time*, *waste time*, or *save time* reflect the conceptual metaphor *TIME IS MONEY*, which reveals not only cognitive structuring but also culturally determined values associated with productivity and economic efficiency.

Culture plays a decisive role in shaping and conventionalizing conceptual metaphors. While some metaphorical patterns appear to be near-universal due to shared human embodiment, many metaphors are deeply rooted in specific cultural models, belief systems, and social practices³. As Kövecses argues, metaphor is simultaneously universal and culture-specific, depending on the interaction between embodied cognition and cultural context. English metaphors often reflect the historical, economic, and ideological background of English-speaking societies, particularly those emphasizing individualism, competition, and linear progress.

The cultural determination of metaphors becomes especially evident in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons, where equivalent abstract concepts are metaphorically structured in different ways. This aspect has significant implications for translation studies, intercultural communication, and foreign language teaching. Misinterpretation of metaphorical meaning may lead to pragmatic failure if cultural conceptualizations are not adequately understood⁴. Therefore, analyzing metaphors solely at the linguistic level is insufficient without considering their cognitive and cultural foundations.

The present article aims to investigate the conceptual structure of metaphors in the English language from a cognitive linguistic perspective, focusing on the ways in which cultural factors influence metaphor formation and usage. By integrating theoretical insights from conceptual metaphor theory with cultural analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate how language, cognition, and culture interact in the construction of metaphorical meaning. Such an approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of metaphor as a cognitive and cultural phenomenon rather than a purely linguistic ornament.

Main Body

Conceptual metaphor theory, as developed within cognitive linguistics, views metaphor as a systematic cognitive phenomenon rather than a decorative linguistic device.

¹ Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. — Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. — 242 p.

² Lakoff G. The contemporary theory of metaphor // *Metaphor and Thought*. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. — P. 202–251.

³ Kövecses Z. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. — 285 p.

⁴ Sharifian F. *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications*. — Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011. — 220 p.

According to this theory, metaphors function through structured mappings between two conceptual domains: a concrete and experientially grounded source domain and a more abstract target domain⁵. These mappings allow speakers to comprehend abstract concepts such as time, emotion, morality, and social relations through familiar physical and cultural experiences. In English, conceptual metaphors are deeply embedded in everyday discourse, shaping not only linguistic expressions but also patterns of reasoning and behavior.

One of the core principles of conceptual metaphor theory is embodiment. Human bodily experience provides the foundational structure for many metaphors, which explains why concepts such as *up-down*, *in-out*, and *movement* are widely used to structure abstract meanings. For example, the metaphor *HAPPINESS IS UP* is reflected in expressions such as *feel up*, *high spirits*, or *rise in mood*, whereas *SADNESS IS DOWN* appearing in *feel down* or *low mood*. Lakoff emphasizes that such metaphors are motivated by recurring correlations between physical experience and emotional states⁶. However, embodiment alone does not fully explain the diversity of metaphorical systems across languages, which makes cultural factors a crucial dimension of analysis.

Cultural determination plays a significant role in shaping how conceptual metaphors are selected, conventionalized, and prioritized within a linguistic community. English, particularly in its modern usage, reflects the cultural values of efficiency, competition, and individual achievement. This is clearly observable in metaphors related to time, work, and success. The widespread metaphor *TIME IS MONEY* manifests itself in expressions such as *invest time*, *save time*, *waste time*, and *budget time*. As Kövecses notes, such metaphors are not merely cognitive but also ideological, as they encode cultural attitudes toward productivity and economic rationality⁷.

Another prominent conceptual metaphor in English is *ARGUMENT IS WAR*, which structures discourse about debate and disagreement. Expressions like *defend a position*, *attack an argument*, *win a debate*, or *shoot down an idea* illustrate how verbal interaction is framed in terms of conflict. This metaphor reflects a cultural model in which argumentation is viewed as competitive rather than cooperative. Lakoff and Johnson argue that this metaphor influences not only language but also social practice, shaping how speakers engage in discussions and evaluate communicative success⁸.

To illustrate the relationship between conceptual metaphors, linguistic expressions, and cultural motivation, the following table presents selected English conceptual metaphors with their source domains and cultural interpretations.

Table 1. Conceptual Metaphors in English and Their Cultural Motivation

Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain	Examples in English	Cultural Interpretation
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⁵ Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. — Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. — 242 p.

⁶ Lakoff G. The contemporary theory of metaphor // *Metaphor and Thought*. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. — P. 202–251.

⁷ Kövecses Z. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. — 285 p.

⁸ Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. — Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. — 242 p.

Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain	Examples in English	Cultural Interpretation
TIME IS MONEY	Economics	Time	spend time, save time, waste time	Emphasis on productivity and efficiency
ARGUMENT IS WAR	Physical conflict	Argumentation	attack an argument, defend a point	Competitive discourse culture
LIFE IS A JOURNEY	Movement, travel	Life	go through life, reach a goal	Linear view of progress and success
IDEAS ARE OBJECTS	Physical objects	Thoughts	grasp an idea, throw out an idea	Materialization of abstract thinking

Source: Lakoff & Johnson (1980); Kövecses (2010)

While some conceptual metaphors appear to be widely shared across cultures due to common embodied experiences, their linguistic realization and cultural prominence differ significantly. For instance, the metaphor *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* exists in many languages, but in English it often emphasizes personal goals, progress, and self-realization, reflecting individualistic cultural norms. Sharifian argues that such differences are best explained through the concept of cultural conceptualizations, which integrate collective cultural experience into cognitive models⁹.

The cultural specificity of metaphors poses important challenges for translation and foreign language teaching. Learners of English may understand the literal meanings of metaphorical expressions but fail to grasp their pragmatic or cultural implications. This can lead to misinterpretation or inappropriate usage in communication. Therefore, incorporating cognitive and cultural explanations of metaphor into language education can significantly enhance learners' metaphorical competence and intercultural awareness.

The conceptual structure of metaphors in English is shaped by an interaction between embodied cognition and culturally determined models of experience. Cognitive linguistics provides a powerful framework for analyzing this interaction, revealing how metaphors function as bridges between language, thought, and culture. Understanding these mechanisms is essential not only for theoretical linguistics but also for applied fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and language pedagogy.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that conceptual metaphors in English are not merely linguistic expressions but fundamental cognitive structures shaped by both embodied experience and cultural context. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphors function as systematic mappings that enable speakers to conceptualize abstract phenomena through concrete domains. The analysis confirms that while some metaphors have universal cognitive foundations, their selection, frequency, and interpretation are largely culturally determined.

⁹ Sharifian F. *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications*. — Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011. — 220 p.

Understanding the conceptual and cultural dimensions of metaphor is therefore essential for effective cross-cultural communication, translation, and foreign language teaching..

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