

THE CONCEPT OF METAPHOR AND ITS ROLE IN LINGUISTICS

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Annotation: This article analyzes the linguistic and cognitive essence of metaphor and how it expands the semantic and imaginative potential of language. Metaphor is interpreted not only as a literary stylistic device but also as a fundamental conceptual model of human cognition. Based on the theory of conceptual metaphor, examples are provided to explain how humans understand abstract concepts through concrete experience. The study also explores the linguistic, literary, cognitive, and cultural forms of metaphor and their role in linguistics. Furthermore, the influence of metaphor not only on language structure but also on worldview and perception is examined. The article provides a thorough analysis of metaphor at the intersection of linguistics, cognitive science, and cultural studies, substantiating its significance in modern linguistics.

Keywords: Metaphor, linguistics, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, semantics, cognition, imagery

INTRODUCTION. Language is a reflection of human thought and worldview. Each word, phrase, or sentence encapsulates not only information but also meaning, emotion, and cultural connotations. In this regard, metaphor plays a significant role as a tool that enhances the imagery of language. Through metaphor, language gains not only aesthetic power but also serves as a means of understanding the world on a cognitive basis.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF METAPHOR. Metaphor is a fundamental scientific concept in various disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, cultural studies, and

psychology. It generally functions as a device that creates new meaning by naming one object or phenomenon with the term of another, relying on similarity between the two. The theoretical foundations of metaphor date back to ancient times and have been interpreted differently by scholars throughout history.

The scientific study of metaphor began in Ancient Greek philosophy. Initial theoretical insights can be found in the works of Aristotle, who defined metaphor as "the transference of a word from its natural meaning to another." According to him, metaphor enhances the beauty of speech, makes information more memorable, and increases expressiveness. Aristotle linked metaphor more closely to poetics and rhetoric rather than logical analysis and reasoning, and thus viewed it as a part of literary and oratory skill.

During the Middle Ages, metaphor attracted attention in relation to religious and philosophical interpretations, especially in the commentary on sacred texts. Many symbolic and figurative expressions in the Bible and the Qur'an were interpreted metaphorically. In the Renaissance era, metaphor regained value as a vital element of literary creativity and was viewed as a creative aspect of thinking.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, European linguists—particularly Ferdinand de Saussure—viewed language as a social phenomenon governed by strict structure, but did not delve deeply into the study of metaphor. During this period, metaphor was mostly examined within the framework of stylistics and semantics, focusing on meaning transformation and expressive features. It was often discussed in relation to similes and comparisons.

A turning point in metaphor theory occurred in 1980 with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. They reinterpreted metaphor not merely as an aesthetic device but as a conceptual model central to human cognition. According to the theory of conceptual metaphor, people comprehend the world primarily through concrete experiences and attempt to grasp abstract concepts via metaphorical thinking.

Examples:

- “Time is money” – conceptualizing time as a resource.

- “Ideas are objects” – describing thoughts with verbs like "load," "grasp," or "lose."
- “Life is a journey” – perceiving life as a path with stages and directions.

This theory explains metaphor as a multifaceted cognitive process. Metaphor is no longer viewed as mere semantic transference but as a mental connection between conceptual domains (e.g., "life" and "journey").

METAPHOR IN MODERN LINGUISTICS. In contemporary linguistic research, metaphor has reached a new level of understanding. It is now studied not merely as a stylistic element but as a conceptual phenomenon that reflects mechanisms of cognition and perception. Especially since the 1980s, the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson has marked a significant paradigm shift. According to their theory, metaphor is not a decorative feature of language but a core element of human thought embedded in everyday cognition.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson defined metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon and demonstrated that it is an integral part of human thinking. Their theory asserts that individuals interpret abstract ideas through metaphorical reasoning based on concrete experiences. For instance:

- The metaphor “Life is a journey” conceptualizes life through the lens of movement, direction, and stages.
- “Time is money” reflects the valuation of time as a limited and spendable resource (“saving time,” “wasting time”).

These are referred to as **primary conceptual metaphors** in modern linguistics. They reveal the complex interconnections between language, culture, cognition, and perception. This approach allows us to view language not as a passive reflector of thought but as an active cognitive system. Metaphors play a decisive role in forming, explaining, and communicating general understandings of the world.

Recent studies also focus on metaphor in cultural contexts, showing that different societies have distinct metaphorical models. For example, in Western culture, the metaphor “Life is a struggle” is prevalent, while in Eastern traditions, life is often conceptualized using natural metaphors like “Life is a river.” Such variations are particularly relevant for **linguocultural analysis**.

Furthermore, metaphor is now being applied in various fields such as **corpus linguistics**, **cognitive semantics**, **discourse analysis**, and even **artificial intelligence** and **machine translation**. Linguists examine not only the structure of metaphors but also their usage in specific social and communicative contexts. Metaphors in political speeches, religious discourse, advertising, and media texts are studied for their influence on public perception and persuasion strategies.

Thus, in modern linguistics, metaphor is understood as a universal phenomenon rooted in deep semantic and cognitive mechanisms, intricately linked to human thought, culture, and social life.

TYPES OF METAPHORS. Metaphors can be classified as follows:

1. **Linguistic metaphor** – metaphorical expressions formed through language units.
2. **Conceptual (cognitive) metaphor** – models for understanding abstract concepts through concrete experiences.
3. **Literary metaphor** – figurative expressions used in artistic texts to enhance imagery.
4. **Cultural metaphor** – expressions rooted in a particular culture’s worldview and mentality.

SEMANTIC AND COGNITIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF METAPHOR. Metaphor is one of the primary tools of human cognition, enabling the creation and understanding of new concepts through language. It is especially useful in explaining newly emerging scientific terms and abstract ideas. In this sense, metaphor serves as a bridge between language and thought.

CONCLUSION. Metaphor is not merely a literary device but a conceptual model of human cognition. Through metaphor, language gains imagery, meaning becomes deeper, and thinking becomes more systematic. Today, metaphor should be studied not just as an aesthetic tool but as a cognitive structure that forms the basis of knowledge. The exploration of metaphor in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cultural studies remains a pressing issue in modern science.

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