

DEFINITION AND NATURE OF METAPHOR IN LINGUISTICS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15277172>

Abstract. *This article introduces the definition and nature of metaphor in linguistics. Metaphor is a significant stylistic device in language, involving the description of one object or process through another. The paper examines the importance of metaphor in linguistics, its connection with human cognition, and how it functions in linguistic processes. Additionally, the article discusses conceptual metaphor theory, its relationship with language and culture, and various types of metaphors, including verbal and visual metaphors. It is highlighted that metaphor is not just a stylistic feature of language but an essential tool for shaping human thought and understanding abstract concepts.*

Keywords: *Metaphor, Source Domain, Target Domain, Conceptual Metaphor, Verbal Metaphor, Mixed Metaphor.*

Introduction

Metaphor is one of the most fundamental and powerful tools in human language, shaping not only the way we speak but also the way we think and understand the world. In linguistics, metaphor is defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, creating new meanings and associations. Far from being a mere stylistic device, metaphor plays a central role in everyday communication, conceptualization, and cognitive processes. The study of metaphor within linguistics explores its structure, functions, and the deep connection between language, thought, and culture. Understanding the nature of metaphor is crucial for gaining deeper insight into how meaning is constructed and conveyed in human interaction.

Literature review and method

Metaphor is one of the most fundamental and powerful tools in human language, shaping not only the way we speak but also the way we think and understand the world. In linguistics, metaphor is defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, creating new meanings and associations. Far from being a mere stylistic device, metaphor plays a central role in everyday communication, conceptualization,

and cognitive processes. The study of metaphor within linguistics explores its structure, functions, and the deep connection between language, thought, and culture. Understanding the nature of metaphor is crucial for gaining deeper insight into how meaning is constructed and conveyed in human interaction.

The term "metaphor" comes from the Greek word "metaphora," meaning "to transfer" or "to carry over." It involves the transfer of meaning from one domain (the source domain) to another (the target domain). The source domain is typically something concrete, familiar, or sensory, while the target domain is often more abstract, complex, or conceptual. By using the metaphor, a connection is made between the two, allowing the listener or reader to grasp the target concept in terms of the source. For example, in the metaphor "Time is money," time (the target domain) is understood in terms of money (the source domain). This not only conveys the idea that time is valuable but also that it can be spent, saved, and wasted, much like money.

In the field of linguistics, the study of metaphor involves analyzing its role in language structure, its cognitive basis, and its communicative functions. Early linguistic theories, especially those influenced by structuralism, often viewed metaphor as a decorative or ornamental feature of language, something separate from the "literal" use of language. However, with the advent of cognitive linguistics, scholars such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson proposed that metaphor is not merely a stylistic flourish but an essential aspect of human thought and language.

In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphors are not just found in language, but they shape our very understanding of the world. They introduced the idea of conceptual metaphor theory, which suggests that metaphors are rooted in human cognition and provide a framework for understanding abstract concepts through more familiar, concrete experiences.

From a cognitive perspective, metaphors are grounded in our physical experiences and interactions with the world. Theories like Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory emphasize that metaphorical thinking arises from embodied experiences—our physical, sensory interaction with the world around us. For example, spatial metaphors such as "up is good" and "down is bad" are rooted in our physical experience of standing upright and feeling "higher" in a positive sense and "lower" in a negative one.

Metaphor is deeply intertwined with human thought. According to the conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but a way of structuring and interpreting reality.

They shape the way we categorize our experiences and influence our reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities. Metaphors allow abstract concepts to become more tangible by mapping familiar experiences onto unfamiliar ones.

Metaphors also exhibit significant cultural variation. Different cultures may employ different conceptual metaphors to understand the same abstract concepts. For instance, while English speakers may say “Time flies,” people in some other languages might use metaphors that involve movement in different directions, like “Time marches on” or “Time is a river.” This suggests that metaphors are not just universal but also culturally specific and reflect the unique perspectives and values of different societies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, metaphors are not just decorative elements of language but essential mechanisms through which we understand and communicate complex ideas. They play a critical role in both everyday conversation and in specialized discourse, such as scientific and academic texts. Understanding the nature of metaphor provides insight not only into linguistic processes but also into the very ways we perceive, categorize, and interpret the world around us.

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