

METAPHOR AS A RESEMBLANCE PHENOMENON

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Abstract. *This study examines metaphor as a resemblance phenomenon across academic, promotional, and temporal-spatial discourse. Drawing on existing literature, it highlights how metaphors serve cognitive, communicative, and cultural functions. Through analysis of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) academic settings, promotional tourism discourse (PTD), and cross-linguistic temporal metaphors, the research reveals metaphor's role in framing abstract concepts through familiar domains. Findings underscore metaphor's significance in shaping understanding, persuasion, and worldview across contexts, reaffirming its foundational status in language and cognition.*

Keywords: *metaphor, resemblance, academic discourse, tourism language, temporal metaphors, linguistic relativity, conceptual mapping*

Introduction

Metaphor, long recognized as a literary device, has emerged as a crucial cognitive and communicative tool across disciplines and discourse types. Far from being ornamental, metaphor functions as a fundamental mechanism for constructing meaning, especially through resemblance-based mappings that allow abstract or unfamiliar concepts to be understood via more familiar or tangible domains. Whether in academic, promotional, or cultural contexts, metaphors guide perception, shape understanding, and influence behavior by creating associative links between domains of experience.

This phenomenon is especially relevant in the context of globalized communication, where English functions as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in diverse settings such as English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms, tourism marketing, and cross-cultural discourse. Recent studies—including those by MacArthur & Alejo-González (2024), Iritspukhova (2023), and Huszka et al. (2025)—collectively reveal that metaphors operate as dynamic resemblance tools that structure thought, mediate communication, and reflect deep-seated cultural frameworks.

These insights expand our understanding of metaphor beyond stylistics, framing it as a key element of conceptual and semiotic organization across different communicative contexts.

Methodology

The author employed a qualitative methodology centered on analysis of existing literature available through open-source academic publications. The studies reviewed—MacArthur & Alejo-González (2024), Iritspukhova (2023), and Huszka et al. (2025)—draw on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistic frameworks to examine the functions of metaphor in academic, promotional, and cultural contexts.

The analysis synthesizes findings from these sources to explore how metaphor operates as a resemblance phenomenon across communicative domains.

Results

Metaphor, as a phenomenon of resemblance, plays a vital cognitive and communicative role in academic discourse, facilitating abstract reasoning through the mapping of familiar concepts onto complex ideas. As MacArthur and Alejo-González (2024) demonstrate, metaphors in English academic settings are not merely stylistic embellishments but serve essential ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, such as explaining and evaluating concepts, framing problems, and organizing discourse (pp. 49–50). Despite this ubiquity, the presence and role of metaphor have been largely overlooked in contexts where English functions as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), particularly within English Medium Instruction (EMI) environments across European universities. Previous research has disproportionately focused on idioms rather than broader metaphor use in ELF, leaving a critical gap in understanding how non-native speakers of English (NNES) employ metaphor to establish conceptual resemblance and shared understanding in academic exchanges (MacArthur & Alejo-González, 2024, p. 50).

This underrepresentation is particularly surprising given the growing prevalence of EMI programs, where metaphor continues to support clarity and engagement even in linguistically diverse classrooms. Methodological challenges—such as defining and identifying metaphor, as well as the scarcity of appropriate corpora—have further hindered research in this area. To address this, the authors introduce the MetCLIL corpus, a novel and fully metaphor-tagged dataset from nine business and marketing seminars at European universities, which enables systematic analysis of metaphor in EMI settings (MacArthur & Alejo-González, 2024, pp. 52–53). The detailed exploration of this corpus confirms that metaphor remains a key mechanism for conceptual resemblance and pedagogical scaffolding, even among NNES participants, reinforcing its centrality to effective academic communication in ELF contexts.

Metaphor, understood as a resemblance phenomenon, plays a strategic and multifaceted role in promotional tourism discourse (PTD), shaping not only how destinations are conceptualized but also how they are emotionally and ideologically framed. Iritspukhova (2023) underscores the persuasive power of metaphor in promotional contexts, highlighting its cognitive and emotional impact on target audiences (p. 94). Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), she emphasizes how metaphors allow audiences to understand abstract tourism experiences through more concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003; Kövecses, 2020).

This conceptual resemblance—where intangible experiences like relaxation or adventure are likened to tangible metaphors such as “escape,” “journey,” or “paradise”—helps forge connections between potential tourists and imagined destinations, enhancing both memorability and desirability (Semino, 2008; Burgers et al., 2015).

This resemblance-driven function of metaphor is particularly crucial in PTD, which seeks to promote intangible products—namely, experiences (Francesconi, 2008, p. 181). As Iritspukhova (2023) notes, the metaphorical framing in tourism advertisements transforms ordinary locations into extraordinary and desirable tourist sites (p. 95). For instance, describing a destination as a “hidden gem” not only conveys its unique value but also invokes a sense of exclusivity and discovery. These metaphorical constructions are not merely decorative; they actively govern the “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011) and influence behavior by shaping perceptions of value and meaning. Hence, metaphor in PTD is not just a linguistic flourish but a mechanism of semiotic control (Dann, 1996), encouraging specific interpretations and emotional responses.

Despite the efficacy of metaphors in shaping perception, the field has historically neglected their study within tourism discourse. Iritspukhova (2023) identifies this gap, arguing that although tourism language is already euphoric and emphatic, metaphor remains underexplored (p. 96). Previous scholars (e.g., Calvi, 2001; Djafarova & Anderson, 2008) suggested that tourism discourse may not require metaphor due to its already rich expressive palette. However, Iritspukhova's analysis, grounded in CMT and discourse-analytical methods, shows that metaphor not only enriches the language of tourism but also offers insight into the ideological and cultural dimensions of destination branding. As such, metaphors act as semiotic bridges, connecting linguistic form, cultural framing, and marketing function.

The systemic-narrative hybrid methodology employed in the article further reveals that metaphors in PTD often fulfill three interconnected roles: communicative, conceptual, and linguistic. These roles collectively support the construction of persuasive narratives that resonate across cultures while also allowing for localized expressions of identity and experience (Iritspukhova, 2023, p. 96). For example, metaphorical models like “journey is transformation” or “destination as paradise” are not only prevalent but culturally adaptable, enabling marketers to appeal to diverse tourist sensibilities while retaining a coherent global narrative. This communicative strategy affirms the metaphor's function as a resemblance mechanism, mapping familiar ideas onto unfamiliar locales to evoke trust and emotional engagement.

Iritspukhova's (2023) study demonstrates that metaphor, as a resemblance phenomenon, is central to the language of tourism promotion. It serves as a vital cognitive and discursive tool that constructs meaning, elicits emotional responses, and subtly guides consumer behavior. In subsuming abstract experiences into concrete images, metaphors in PTD help create compelling, memorable, and persuasive representations of destinations. While metaphor may have been underestimated in tourism discourse, this research illustrates its foundational role in shaping the symbolic and commercial landscapes of global travel narratives. As such, further exploration into metaphorical practices in PTD is essential for understanding the deeper communicative mechanisms behind travel marketing.

In examining metaphor as a phenomenon of resemblance, Temporal Metaphors as a Linguistic Phenomenon by Huszka et al. (2025) illustrates how languages use metaphor not simply as poetic devices, but as cognitive tools that reflect and shape our perception of abstract domains—particularly time and space. The notion that metaphors enable individuals to grasp unfamiliar concepts through familiar frames underpins much of the research on metaphorical mapping. For instance, the Indonesian phrase *jam karet* (“rubber time”) vividly captures a culturally specific conceptualization of time as elastic and negotiable, contrasting starkly with the Western metaphor of time as a limited commodity (Huszka et al., 2025, p. 33). This metaphorical resemblance highlights not just linguistic variety but also divergent worldviews rooted in cultural practice, affirming the broader premise of linguistic relativity.

The resemblance-based metaphor extends to spatial orientation as well. The use of cardinal direction systems among the Kuuk Thaayorre and the Javanese demonstrates how metaphors grounded in physical space can shape abstract reasoning and even daily behavior. For example, Javanese speakers commonly reference absolute spatial terms—north, south, east, and west—instead of egocentric terms like left or right, which reflects a cultural-linguistic worldview anchored in fixed, external coordinates (Huszka et al., 2025, p. 33). Such metaphoric structuring of space is also evident in sacred architecture, such as Borobudur's alignment with cardinal directions.

These examples underscore how metaphor functions as a resemblance phenomenon by aligning physical experience with abstract reasoning—turning geography into a mental template for orientation and cognition.

This metaphorical resemblance finds strong support in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, particularly its weaker form—linguistic relativity. Linguistic patterns, such as the absence of tense in Malay and Indonesian or the absence of the continuous aspect in German, influence how speakers of these languages perceive and process time-related events. These structural differences lead to cross-linguistic variance in learning and using languages like English. Malay speakers, whose languages use aspect markers similar to English continuous forms, adapt more easily, while German speakers often over- or under-use such constructions (Huszka et al., 2025, p. 34; Swan & Smith, 2001). These tendencies reveal how metaphorical and grammatical structures resemble internalized frameworks that guide linguistic performance and cognitive preference.

Metaphor operates not just as a linguistic embellishment but as a deep-seated cognitive mechanism for structuring reality. As the work of Humboldt (1999) and Cassirer (2020) suggests, language is a “formative organ of thought,” and metaphor is one of its most powerful structuring tools. Through metaphor, speakers translate sensory and cultural experiences into abstract conceptual models, producing patterns of understanding that resonate across domains like time, space, and identity. When Indonesian speakers use *jam karet* or Javanese people orient themselves via the compass, they are engaging with metaphor not merely rhetorically, but cognitively—mapping lived experience onto mental frameworks that resemble and reproduce cultural logic. This resemblance-based metaphorical mapping offers compelling evidence for how language, thought, and culture interweave in shaping human cognition.

Discussion

Across all three studies, metaphor emerges as a critical mechanism for mapping known concepts onto abstract ideas, revealing a unifying function of resemblance. In academic discourse, particularly in ELF contexts such as EMI classrooms, MacArthur and Alejo-González (2024) highlight how metaphor facilitates understanding among non-native speakers by organizing complex ideas into accessible frameworks. Despite methodological challenges in identifying metaphor, their use of the MetCLIL corpus demonstrates that metaphor persists as a scaffolding tool for pedagogical clarity and conceptual resemblance. This aligns with the broader view that metaphors are integral to academic ideation, not merely stylistic embellishments.

In the realm of promotional tourism discourse (PTD), Iritspukhova (2023) builds on the resemblance model by showing how metaphors transform intangible experiences—such as rest, exploration, or transformation—into vivid and persuasive narratives. These metaphors, often culturally resonant (e.g., “paradise,” “hidden gem”), play an emotional and ideological role in branding destinations. The study’s systemic-narrative analysis shows how metaphor acts on communicative, conceptual, and linguistic levels to construct global yet adaptable travel narratives. Compared to academic settings, metaphors in PTD are more explicitly aimed at emotional appeal and behavioral influence, but in both cases, metaphor serves to translate abstract or unfamiliar experiences into comprehensible, relatable forms.

Huszka et al. (2025) provide a cross-cultural and cognitive dimension to the discussion by showing how temporal and spatial metaphors vary across linguistic communities, shaping cognition and perception in culturally specific ways.

The metaphorical conceptualizations of time (e.g., Indonesian jam karet) and space (e.g., Javanese cardinal orientation) underscore the role of metaphor in reflecting and reproducing cultural logic. These linguistic metaphors embody internalized mental models that both guide language use and inform cognitive processing, supporting the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity. The study deepens the notion of metaphor as a resemblance mechanism—not just between conceptual domains, but between language, culture, and cognition itself.

Conclusion

Taken together, these studies affirm that metaphor operates as a cognitive and communicative bridge, structuring discourse across academic, promotional, and cultural spheres through the principle of resemblance. In ELF academic environments, metaphor scaffolds learning and facilitates shared understanding among diverse speakers. In promotional contexts like tourism marketing, metaphor strategically constructs emotional and ideological meanings that shape consumer behavior. In culturally embedded language use, metaphor reveals how people conceptualize abstract domains like time and space through locally grounded frameworks.

The convergence of these findings highlights metaphor's universality and adaptability as a resemblance phenomenon. In order to represent abstract concepts through familiar or culturally relevant experiences, metaphors help people navigate complex situations, foster shared meaning, and strengthen cultural identity. This calls for a broader recognition of metaphor as not only a rhetorical tool but as a foundational element of human thought and communication—one that deserves sustained attention across linguistic, educational, and intercultural domains.

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