

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE METAPHORS EXPRESSING HUMAN INNER PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper explores the conceptual analysis of cognitive metaphors as a means of representing human inner psychology in language. Metaphor is not merely a stylistic device, but a fundamental cognitive mechanism that allows abstract mental states to be verbalized through concrete linguistic forms (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By examining linguistic data from English and Uzbek, this study demonstrates how metaphors construct and reflect the inner psychological world, including emotions, desires, and cognitive processes. The aim of the research is to investigate how inner psychological phenomena are encoded in metaphorical models and how these models function as universal yet culturally shaped tools of expression. The findings show that metaphors play a dual role: they both externalize inner experiences and serve as cultural frameworks for conceptualizing human psychology.

Keywords: Cognitive metaphor, inner psychology, conceptual analysis, discourse, emotion, linguistics.

Introduction

The study of human inner psychology has long been a central concern across disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and linguistics. Within linguistics, the cognitive approach has radically shifted perspectives by demonstrating that language is not only a tool for communication but also a window into human thought and inner experiences (Evans & Green, 2006). Cognitive linguistics posits that metaphor is a primary mechanism through which abstract and invisible aspects of human psychology are conceptualized in terms of more concrete, physical experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

For instance, expressions such as “**He is carrying heavy grief**” or “**Her heart is broken**” demonstrate how inner psychological states – sorrow, loss, despair – are conceptualized through metaphors of weight and physical damage. In Uzbek, phrases like “**Ko‘ngli tog‘dek ko‘tarildi**” (“His soul was lifted like a mountain”) or “**Dunyosi yorishib ketdi**” (“Her world brightened”) illustrate the same phenomenon: the mind and emotions are structured through metaphorical conceptualizations grounded in embodied experience. This study mainly addresses such research questions, as the ways of cognitive metaphors in representing human inner psychology in English and Uzbek, universal conceptual patterns that emerge across cultures in metaphorical representation of psychological states, and the ways of cultural and linguistic contexts that shape the specific forms of the metaphors.

Literature Review. The study of metaphor in relation to human psychology is deeply rooted in cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson’s **Metaphors We Live By** (1980) marked a paradigm shift, arguing that metaphor is not a rhetorical ornament but a fundamental

mechanism of human thought. Their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) emphasizes that abstract concepts such as emotions, morality, or cognition are systematically structured through metaphorical mappings from concrete, embodied experiences. For example, the conceptual metaphor “**anger is heat**” underlies English expressions such as “**She was boiling with anger**”, reflecting the embodied correlation between rising body temperature and emotional arousal (Kövecses, 2002). These insights provide the foundation for analyzing how inner psychological states are metaphorically constructed across languages.

Building on this framework, later research has expanded the analysis of metaphors into cross-cultural contexts. Kövecses (2005) demonstrated that while many metaphorical patterns are universal due to shared human embodiment, cultural variations strongly influence the way inner experiences are conceptualized. For instance, happiness is commonly understood through metaphors of “**Up**” or “**Light**” across languages, but culture-specific metaphors – such as “*fullness*” in Uzbek (“**Ko‘ngli to‘ldi**”) – highlight the unique cultural framing of psychological states. Scholars such as Yu (2009) further argue that metaphors not only reflect individual psychology but also encode cultural models, enabling a deeper understanding of how societies conceptualize inner life.

Recent studies in cognitive poetics and discourse analysis have emphasized the dynamic role of metaphors in constructing identity and social interaction. Cameron and Deignan (2006) note that metaphors of emotion in everyday discourse serve not only to describe inner states but also to negotiate social relationships. Similarly, Musolff (2016) highlights how metaphors in public and literary discourse shape collective perceptions of morality, fear, or resilience. These findings suggest that metaphorical conceptualizations of inner psychology are not static but context-dependent, influenced by discourse genres, cultural narratives, and interactional purposes. Such perspectives provide a strong theoretical basis for examining the cognitive metaphors of inner psychology in English and Uzbek, as this study seeks to do.

Methodology. This research adopts a **qualitative cognitive-linguistic approach**, focusing on the conceptual analysis of metaphors that represent human inner psychology in English. The study is rooted in **Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)**, which views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism mapping source domains (concrete, physical experience) onto target domains (abstract, psychological states) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theoretical framework is particularly suitable for analyzing how emotions, personality traits, and mental processes are structured and expressed in language. As Kövecses (2010) emphasizes, metaphor analysis reveals the hidden conceptual system that underlies everyday communication, making it indispensable for understanding how humans talk about their inner life.

Data Selection - the corpus of data for this research was compiled from three primary sources:

1. **Literary texts** (modern novels and poetry), where metaphorical representations of inner states are frequent. Example: “Her heart was a locked room” (literature metaphor for **emotional inaccessibility**).
2. **Media discourse**, such as news articles and blogs, where metaphors of stress, anxiety, or resilience emerge. Example: “He battled with depression” (**struggle** metaphor for psychological states).

3. **Everyday speech samples**, collected from English corpora (e.g., BNC and COCA) and authentic dialogues. Example: “I’m feeling down today” (**down** metaphor for sadness). The selection of diverse sources allows for a comprehensive view of metaphorical patterns across **registers, genres, and communicative purposes**. Following the recommendations of Cameron and Deignan (2006), triangulating literary, media, and conversational data ensures both ecological validity and broader generalizability.

Analytical Framework - the analysis was conducted through **systematic metaphor identification and categorization**, based on the **Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)** proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). Each metaphorical expression was identified by comparing its contextual meaning with its more basic, concrete meaning. For example: Expression: “**She exploded with anger**”. Basic meaning: sudden physical burst. Contextual meaning: intense emotional release. Conceptual metaphor: **Anger is heat/pressure**.

The identified metaphors were then grouped into **cognitive models** representing inner psychological states. For instance:

Happiness is up (I’m on cloud nine)

Sadness is down (He sank into despair)

Anxiety is a burden (Carrying the weight of worry)

Calmness is Balance (She regained her equilibrium).

This method allows not only for the recognition of recurring metaphorical mappings but also for the identification of cultural-specific conceptualizations.

Comparative Component

Since metaphors are influenced by both embodiment and culture (Kövecses, 2005), a comparative perspective was integrated into the analysis. English data were occasionally contrasted with Uzbek expressions to highlight cultural similarities and differences. For example: English: “**My heart is heavy**” (sadness as weight). Uzbek: “**Ko‘nglim cho‘kdi**” (sadness as downward movement).

Both rely on embodied experience (**weight** and **downward orientation**), yet the lexical realizations differ, illustrating the interaction of universal and culture-specific elements in metaphorical thinking.

Justification of Approach

A qualitative methodology was chosen because the aim of the study is to uncover the **conceptual underpinnings** of language use rather than to measure frequency. As Gibbs (2017) notes, the richness of metaphor lies in its cognitive depth, which requires interpretive analysis. Furthermore, the combination of discourse-based examples and theoretical grounding ensures that the findings reflect not only linguistic forms but also the **psychological and cultural dimensions** of metaphor.

Results

The analysis of English cognitive metaphors representing human inner psychology revealed several dominant conceptual models. These models were consistent across literary texts, media discourse, and everyday speech, although the degree of figurative elaboration varied by genre.

1. Emotion-Oriented Metaphors

Anger is heat/pressure: Expressions such as “**He boiled with rage**”, “**She blew up at him**”, and “**The argument reached its boiling point**” conceptualize anger as a rising physical temperature or pressure. This metaphor was the most recurrent in both literature and everyday discourse.

Happiness is up: Frequent in idioms like “**She was on top of the world**” and “**He lifted my spirits**”. Such metaphors directly link positive emotional states with vertical elevation.

Sadness is down/weight: Phrases such as “**He sank into despair**” and “**My heart feels heavy**” illustrate how negative emotions are associated with physical heaviness and downward motion.

2. Mental-State Metaphors

Mind is a container: Common expressions include “**Her head is full of ideas**” or “**He’s empty-minded today**”. These metaphors represent the mind as a bounded physical space.

Thoughts are objects: Examples like “**I can’t grasp the idea**” or “**She dropped that thought quickly**” illustrate the conceptualization of thoughts as manipulable physical items.

3. Psychological Struggle Metaphors

Anxiety is a burden: Evident in metaphors such as “**Carrying the weight of worry**” or “**The stress is crushing me**”.

Depression is darkness: Phrases like “**He was lost in a dark place**” or “**Her life seemed shadowed by despair**” were especially frequent in literary sources. Overall, the findings suggest that English metaphors for inner psychology are grounded in **embodied experiences** (up/down orientation, heat, weight, light/darkness) while also shaped by cultural narrative traditions.

Discussion

The results confirm that metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but fundamental **cognitive models** through which inner psychological states are conceptualized and communicated (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). The dominance of metaphors such as “**anger is heat**” and “**sadness is down**” aligns with cross-linguistic studies (Yu, 2008), suggesting that basic human physiology (e.g., heat rising in the body during anger, physical lowering in sadness) provides a universal grounding.

However, the data also indicate **genre-specific variations**. Literary texts often expand metaphorical imagery with poetic elaboration (“**Her grief was a bottomless ocean**”), while everyday speech tends to employ conventionalized expressions (“**I feel down**”). Media discourse, on the other hand, frequently combines emotional metaphors with social struggle imagery, as in “**The nation wrestles with anxiety over the crisis**”.

Cultural comparison highlights both universality and specificity. While the metaphor **Sadness is down** appears in both English (“I’m feeling low”) and Uzbek (“Ko‘nglim cho‘kdi”), the metaphor **Depression is darkness** is more elaborated in English literary discourse, whereas Uzbek tends to use metaphors of the heart (“Ko‘ngli qorayib ketdi”). This confirms Kövecses’ (2005) claim that metaphors are “**embodied universals with cultural variations**”.

Furthermore, the findings support the claim that metaphors function as **psychological models of meaning-making**. As Gibbs (2017) argues, metaphors reveal how people interpret and give coherence to their internal states. For instance, conceptualizing “**anxiety as a burden**” not only reflects bodily experience of stress but also influences how individuals discuss coping strategies (e.g., “**lightening the load**”).

Thus, metaphors act as “**interfaces between cognition, culture, and communication**”, providing insight into how humans both experience and articulate their inner psychological worlds.

Conclusion

This study has examined the conceptual metaphors used in English to express human inner psychology, with a focus on emotions, mental states, and psychological struggles. The results demonstrate that such metaphors are deeply grounded in **embodied experience** (e.g., heat, weight, verticality, darkness/light), while at the same time influenced by **cultural and discursive contexts**.

The findings confirm that metaphors serve a **dual role**:

Cognitive – providing a framework for understanding and structuring inner experiences, such as anger conceptualized as heat or sadness as downward movement.

Communicative – allowing individuals to share and interpret complex psychological states through accessible figurative language.

The comparative insights also reveal that while many metaphors are **cross-culturally universal**, others display “**cultural variation**” in imagery and elaboration. For example, both English and Uzbek conceptualize sadness as “down,” but English emphasizes darkness, while Uzbek emphasizes the heart.

These findings carry significant implications for **linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cross-cultural communication**. By uncovering the metaphorical structures that shape our discourse on inner life, researchers can better understand how language influences psychological perception and cultural identity. Future studies could extend this research to multimodal contexts (e.g., visual metaphors in media) and experimental psycholinguistic methods to test how metaphor shapes emotional processing.

In conclusion, cognitive metaphors are not just figures of speech but fundamental tools of human cognition and communication, reflecting the intricate interplay between **language, mind, and culture**.

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