

Jelena Tretjakova
RTU Daugavpils filiāle, Latvija

AN INSIGHT INTO CONTEMPORARY THEORY OF METAPHOR

Abstract

The perception of metaphor has changed significantly since the end of the 20th century. Metaphor is no longer considered to be a purely literary trope; the boundaries of its usage have shifted greatly. Metaphor nowadays is an expressive literary agent studied in numerous fields; it is present in political, economical, scientific, art and other discourses. G.Lakoff and M.Johnson were the pioneers in ascribing completely new characteristics to metaphor and changing its overall perception. G.Lakoff provides a new vision of metaphor coming through a complicated path from the source domain to the target domain. Metaphor can be viewed as a conceptual and linguistic one. The former projects a number of linguistic expressions, t.i. linguistic metaphors that deliver the idea from the source domain to the target domain. The classification of metaphors can serve a platform for a more substantial research and systematizing the data. The report dwells upon the contemporary theory of metaphor, its interpretation and reconsideration in modern linguistics. The approaches to metaphor analysis and study proposed by various linguists are overviewed, too.

Key words: metaphor, theory, conceptual metaphor, linguistic metaphor, mapping, domain

Since the ancient times metaphor has been widely researched and used in the literary language. It has always been considered a solely literary expressive agent that is alienated from the reality and everyday language. *“The word “metaphor” was defined as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of their normal conventional meaning to express a “similar” concept”* [Lakoff 1993: 202]. Metaphor has been retaining such position for centuries, without being viewed from a different angle.

The shift in perception of metaphor occurred with the introduction of G. Lakoff's new concept of metaphor. He can be named a pioneer in ascribing absolutely new features to metaphor and its usage in not only literary language, but in the language as such. He assumes that metaphor is not the matter of language, but the matter of thought. He is the first to state that all our existence is purely metaphorical; we fill our language with metaphors without any purpose, just because it is in our nature, t.i. to see everything through the prism of metaphor. G. Lakoff assumes that *“...everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical”* [Lakoff 1993: 203].

G. Lakoff introduces new approaches to the study of metaphor. Metaphors as such are regarded as mappings laid across the conceptual domains. The result of the new perception of the old theory is that metaphor is considered to be central in everyday language semantics and it embraces thousands of cross-domain mappings from our everyday life.

Jerrold M. Sadock in his work *“Figurative speech and linguistics”* ascribes psychological nature to metaphor saying that *“I take it for granted that the underlying principles governing metaphor are of a general psychological sort and are thus not specifically linguistic...”*

[Sadock 1993: 42]. Metaphors arise independently on the language system, thus they are not directly referred to it. The idea expressed is similar to that developed by G. Lakoff, and is shifting the role of metaphor. We are prone to base our knowledge on experience, and the empirical foundation as such lays the basis for metaphoricity.

Based on the two postulates expounded above, it could be said that our everyday language is to a great extent metaphorical. Mappings are formed in the mind and laid from the source domain to the target domain. The concept of metaphor has resounded differently, namely, as “*a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. The term “metaphorical expression” refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, sentence) that is the surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping*” [Lakoff 1993: 203]. The mappings are considered to be the set of correspondences and have a definite structure. G. Lakoff introduces mnemonic designation of the mappings giving them the following form: TARGET-DOMAIN IS SOURCE-DOMAIN or TARGET-DOMAIN AS SOURCE-DOMAIN. The concept is explicitly shown on the example of the mapping LOVE IS A JOURNEY. He assumes that the set of metaphoric correspondences that arise through the aforementioned mapping could be as follows:

- *Those involved in the love affair correspond to travelers;*
- *The relationships between lovers correspond to a vehicle*
- *The common goal of the lovers corresponds to the common destination on the journey.*

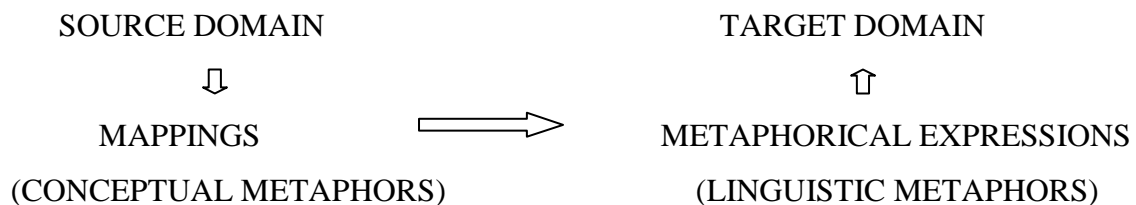
Thus, the metaphorical expressions occurring in reference to this could be as follows:

- *The relationship isn't going anywhere.*
- *Our relationship is off the track.*
- *We can't turn back now.*
- *We may have to go our separate ways.*
- *Our relationship has hit a dead-end street.* [Lakoff 1993: 206]

G. Lakoff emphasizes that it is a common error to confuse the name of the mapping with the mapping itself. LOVE IS A JOURNEY is a name of the mapping causing the set of correspondences. Names of the mappings are offered just for developing the further set of metaphorical correspondences. Thus, G. Lakoff identifies mappings to conceptual metaphors, or, in other words, set of conceptual or as he proposes, ontological, correspondences. They could be considered the path across the source domain to the target domain.

As a point of significance, G. Lakoff also differentiates between conceptual metaphors and linguistic expressions. In all the examples referring to the mapping LOVE IS A JOURNEY

we do not observe a number of metaphors, it is just one conceptual metaphor with a row of linguistic expressions – a metaphor of love being conceptualized as a journey, and being expressed by a variety of metaphorical expressions. Thus, metaphors could be referred to as conceptual mappings, or metaphors, with the metaphorical expressions being individual linguistic expressions. [Lakoff 1993: 209]. This path from the source domain to the target domain thus could be schematically shown as follows:



The source domain lays the foundation for the concept, which in its turn forms mappings, or conceptual metaphors. The conceptual metaphor will further provide a whole number of linguistic expressions, or as we might call them linguistic metaphors, that finally deliver the idea to the target domain.

Zoltán Kövecses develops Lakoff’s idea of differentiation between metaphors as mappings and metaphors as metaphorical expressions, pointing out that metaphorical expressions are solely the representation of the mappings [Kövecses 2010: 45]. Representation of the mappings, or in other words, conceptual metaphors, projected from the source domain can pass a long way towards the target domain until they transfer the notion to the recipient. Since these paths may vary to a great extent, he suggests there should be differentiation between kinds of conceptual metaphors. There might be various aspects that allow us to categorize metaphors. This report dwells upon on categorization of conceptual metaphors in accordance to their conventionality and function. Let us have a brief insight into implication of each of the aforementioned categories.

1. The conventionality of metaphor

This could be named a most comprehensible aspect representing the essence of metaphor. The questions that arise under the theme is how deeply rooted the metaphor is; how widely-used and accepted it is by the ordinary public. Thus, to define the degree of the metaphor’s conventionality, one should trace the usage of the metaphor in speech; to see how well established it is in our minds. Here Kövecses proposes a term of “conceptualized”, or highly conventionalized, metaphor, t.i. *a metaphor that is well established and deeply entrenched* [Kövecses 2010: 34]. This approach supports the idea of the world being deeply metaphorical,

since in our ordinary communication use of metaphor can remain unnoticed; we may use it without deliberate purpose. If one says: “He has defended his point of view persuasively”, or “We have to construct a new strategy”, or “The business is growing fast”, the speaker will cognize the idea immediately. This allows us to assume that such conceptual metaphors, or mappings, respectively as UPHOLDING OPINIONS IS WAR, STRATEGY IS A BUILDING or ORGANIZATIONS ARE PLANTS are highly conventional. They can be comprehended easily by the majority of recipients.

Such highly conventional metaphors are considered in opposition to the unconventional or novel metaphors. The mappings can still be conventional but the metaphorical expressions used to deliver the idea to the target domain can be unconventional in their nature. The metaphors of such type can be found not only in poetic language; a lot of contemporary commercial artists, politicians, journalists and representatives of other professions are in constant search for such non-standard linguistic expressions to manifest their ideas. The examples of this kind of metaphors could be as follows:

- *Stop the world. I want to get off.* – The mapping of the metaphor is LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which is a purely conventional conceptual metaphor. But the metaphorical expressions chosen for manifesting the idea are out of the ordinary and seem unconventional.
- *“If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest”* (a quote by Benjamin Franklin). – We could assume that the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS WEALTH is quite a conventionalized one, but the linguistic expressions used by the author are uncommon.

The conventionality of the source domain mappings makes it easy to perceive the idea expressed by the author. The situation will differ if both the conceptual metaphor and its representation in the target domain are unconventionalized. Let us consider an advertising slogan of the Kleenex Company for the Kleenex Tissues, which sounds like: “Don’t put a cold in your pocket!” We could map the following conceptual metaphor: DESEASES ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS which can hardly be regarded as a conventional one. The linguistic expressions used to signify the idea are not common, either. Thus the perception of the idea is not easy. The usage of such conceptual metaphors could be to a great extent conditioned by the willingness of the author to attract the recipient, to make the speech or writing more impressive and to make the target audience think.

2. The function of the metaphor

The function of metaphor could be another prerequisite for relating metaphor to a certain category. Z. Kövecses suggests there should be three kinds of metaphors distinguished in accordance to their cognitive function, namely, structural, ontological and orientational ones. Let us have a brief review of the metaphors named above.

2.1. Structural metaphors

Structural metaphors arise when the source domain provides "*rich knowledge structure for the target concept*" [Kövecses 2010: 37]. The source target projects easily perceived and comprehensible mappings that deliver the metaphor to the target source in a comprehensible way. Z. Kövecses explicates the idea using the concept of time. If we consider the following examples,

- *The time for action has arrived;*
- *I'm looking ahead to Christmas;*
- *Time is flying by;*
- *Thanksgiving is coming up on us* [Kövecses 2010: 38]

we could see that the conceptual metaphor can be represented as a mapping TIME PASSING IS MOTION OF AN OBJECT. The observer has a steady position and the things, objects are moving towards him.

In contrast, the following mapping can arise – TIME PASSING IS AN OBSERVER'S MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE with the following examples:

- *His stay in Russia extended for many years;*
- *We passed the time happily;*
- *We are getting close to Christmas.*

In the aforementioned metaphorical expressions the time gains steady fixed position and the observer is moving towards it. The understanding of both source domain and target domain make the metaphor clear and more comprehensible. *One concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 14]

2.2. Ontological metaphors

Collins Concise English Dictionary provides the following definition of ontology: "the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being." [Collins Concise English Dictionary 2008: 1166] Ontological metaphors are less transparently projected from the source domain to the target concept. Their task is to provide new ontological status to general categories of abstract target concepts. The abstract notions can be referred to as entities. This can be achieved through the introduction of ontological metaphors that might serve the purpose of quantifying, identifying, referring, setting goals etc. In other words, they contribute to the comprehension of nonphysical objects as an entity. An abstraction, such as an activity,

emotion, or idea, is represented as something concrete, such as an object, substance, container, or person. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson provide the following examples to manifest the use of ontological metaphors:

- *I can't keep up with the pace of modern life.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 27] –Life course is perceived as speed of some physical object. *His emotional health has deteriorated recently. The pressure of his responsibilities caused his breakdown.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 27] – Health, emotional state of a person or work appear to adopt some physical abilities not usual to the abstract notions.
- *He went to New York to seek fame and fortune. I want to find true happiness in this life.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 27] – Fame and happiness are apprehended as physical objects that could be lost, found, moved etc.

Personification can be assumed of as a form of ontological metaphor. A physical object is mapped to the target domain as a human being. Such mappings allow us to perceive non-human entities through human characteristics, motivations, actions, etc. Consider the examples below:

- *Inflation is eating up our profits. This fact argues against the standard theories. Life has cheated me.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 33]

The examples above have one feature in common, i.e. they characterize the nonhuman in terms of human behavior. G. Lakoff goes further into the detailed study of personified ontological metaphors, mentioning that the nature of personification may differ. In considering the examples below we can draw some other conclusions related to the essence of personification.

- *Our biggest enemy right now is inflation. Inflation has robbed me of my savings. The dollar has been destroyed by inflation.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 33].

The conceptual metaphor built into the source domain is not just INFLATION IS A PERSON (as in the previous set of examples), but rather INFLATION IS AN ENEMY. Such mapping contributes to the better understanding of not just the behavior of inflation but of the potential actions against it. Personification provides for the use of one of the most accessible and close to the human being source domains, namely, our own existence.

2.3. Orientational metaphors

Orientational metaphors can be opposed to the structural ones in such a way that they do not build the metaphorical structure of one concept in terms of another, but rather “...organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another” [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 14]. They are given the term of “orientational” due to their spatial focus: in-out, up-down, from-to, etc. The nature of orientational metaphors lays deeply in our physical structure or culture. Thus, it is

common to relate most positive feelings to movement up, and negative ones – to moving down. This could be due to the physical specifics of our body to be straight up in reference to positive state, and drooping posture manifesting sadness or unhappiness. The examples below are illustrating the theory:

- *I'm feeling up. My spirits rose. He's in high spirits. – I'm feeling down. He's really low these days. My spirits sank.* [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 15]

Another conceptual metaphor designating the use of orientational metaphor could be HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP and SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN. The common examples, such as “*He is in top shape*”, “*He is at the peak of health*”, and “*He came down with the flu*”, “*His health is declining*” [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 15] are explained by the physical basis common to everyone, i.e. during an illness we tend to take lying position, while getting better suggests getting up and taking upward position. [Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 16]. This category of metaphors is widely represented in the language.

Contemporary theory has broadened the borders of metaphor study. It has viewed metaphor from a different angle. Metaphors may be classified variously and in many cases there might be overlaps between the categories. Thus, orientational metaphors could have functions of ontological ones, while some ontological metaphors could be purely structural in their nature. However, any differentiation and subsumption might help a linguist to structure his analysis or systematizing the data. This study presents just a superficial insight into some categories of metaphor and contemporary theory of metaphor. The classification reviewed above could serve a platform for a more essential study both of theoretical and practical material. Using the classification of metaphors allows us to cognize the conceptuality of the world and to trace the metaphoricity more efficiently.

Bibliography

1. Knowles M., Moon, R. *Introducing Metaphor*. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.
2. Kövecses, Z. *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction*. Oxford University press, Inc., 2010
3. Lakoff, G. Johnson, M. *Metaphors, We Live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
4. Lakoff, G. *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* In: Ortony, A. *Metaphor and Thought*. Second Edition: Cambridge University Press, 1993 (pp. 202 – 252)
5. Sadock, J.M. *Figurative Speech and Linguistics*. In: Ortony, A. *Metaphor and Thought*. Second Edition: Cambridge University Press, 1993 (pp. 42 – 58)
6. *Collins Concise English Dictionary*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2008.