
CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND MENTAL REPRESENTATION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. This thesis explores the relationship between conceptual metaphor and mental representation in English within the framework of cognitive linguistics. Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the study investigates how abstract concepts are understood through concrete experiential domains and how these metaphorical mappings shape human cognition. Particular attention is given to the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor formation and their contribution to mental representation. The findings demonstrate that conceptual metaphors are fundamental cognitive structures that reflect cultural values, guide reasoning, and facilitate the interpretation of abstract experiences.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cognitive linguistics, mental representation, conceptualization, cognitive processes, metaphorical mapping, English language, language and cognition, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, translation studies.

In contemporary linguistics, cognitive approaches play a crucial role in explaining how language reflects human thinking and conceptual organization. Among these approaches, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) occupies a central position, as it examines the way abstract ideas are structured and understood through more concrete experiential domains. In English, conceptual metaphors are not merely stylistic elements but function as cognitive tools that reveal how individuals mentally represent reality and process information [1].

A conceptual metaphor operates through cross-domain mapping, where one conceptual domain (source) is used to structure and comprehend another domain (target). For example, metaphors such as “ARGUMENT IS WAR,” “TIME IS MONEY,” or “LIFE IS A JOURNEY” illustrate how English speakers

conceptualize abstract experiences through familiar physical or social activities. These mappings

form the foundation of mental representations, shaping patterns of reasoning, emotional responses, and linguistic expressions.

In recent decades, scholars have emphasized that metaphorical structures are deeply embedded in human cognition, influencing not only everyday communication but also cultural values, learning processes, and problem-solving strategies. As a result, studying conceptual metaphors in relation to mental representation provides valuable insights into how meaning is constructed, categorized, and interpreted in the English language. This inquiry is also important for fields such as psycholinguistics, translation studies, discourse analysis, and foreign language teaching, where understanding cognitive patterns significantly enhances interpretive competence [2].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the mechanisms of conceptual metaphor formation in English, explore their relationship with mental representation, and present theoretical findings through tables and a diagram. The results contribute to the broader understanding of how metaphor functions as both a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, offering practical implications for linguistic theory and applied domains. The study of conceptual metaphor and mental representation in English is grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics, which views language as an integral part of human cognition. According to Lakoff and Johnson's seminal framework (1980), metaphors are not merely stylistic embellishments but fundamental cognitive structures that shape how individuals perceive, conceptualize, and interact with the world. This section presents an overview of key theoretical constructs, mechanisms of metaphor formation, and their relation to mental representation in English[3].

1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposes that metaphors arise from systematic correspondences-referred to as **mappings**-between two conceptual domains:

- **Source domain:** a concrete, familiar area of experience
 - **Target domain:** an abstract or complex concept that requires structuring
- Through these mappings, speakers understand abstract phenomena such as time, emotions, or reasoning in terms of more tangible experiences like motion, physical objects, or spatial orientation[4].

Table 1. Typical Conceptual Mappings in English

Source Domain	Target Domain	Example Expressions	Cognitive Function
WAR	Argument	<i>He defended his point; She attacked my idea</i>	Frames argument as confrontation
JOURNEY	Life	<i>We are at a crossroads; He reached his goals</i>	Structures life as purposeful movement
MONEY	Time	<i>Spend time; Waste time; Save time</i>	Represents time as a limited resource
LIGHT/DARKNESS	Knowledge/Ignorance	<i>A bright idea; In the dark about it</i>	Encodes knowledge through visual metaphors

These metaphorical structures operate as mental schemas that guide interpretation and reasoning, even when speakers are not consciously aware of them.

2. Mental Representation and Cognitive Structures

Mental representations refer to the internal cognitive models through which individuals encode, store, and retrieve information. In the context of metaphor, mental representation involves the activation of conceptual structures linked to prior experiences[5].

For example, when encountering the phrase “**She won the argument**,” the mind draws upon the WAR schema-conflict, strategy, victory-thus shaping an understanding of argumentation as competition rather than cooperation.

Key cognitive mechanisms involved[6]:

- **Schema activation** - recalling a structured set of knowledge.
- **Frame-based reasoning** - interpreting situations according to culturally shared frames.
- **Embodied cognition** - conceptualizing abstract ideas using bodily experience.

Table 2. Cognitive Mechanisms Underlying Metaphorical Thought

Mechanism	Description	Example in English
Embodiment	Reliance on physical experience to conceptualize abstract notions	<i>I'm feeling up / I'm feeling down</i>
Image Schemas	Recurrent cognitive patterns such as PATH, CONTAINER, BALANCE	<i>In trouble, Out of danger</i>
Conceptual Blending	Integration of elements from different domains to produce new meaning	<i>A storm of emotions</i>
Prototype Effects	Use of typical examples to organize concepts	<i>A mother is a caregiver (prototype)</i>

3. Interaction Between Conceptual Metaphor and Mental

Representation

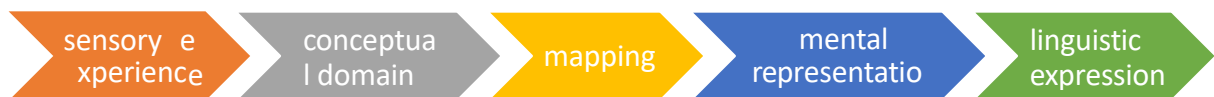
Metaphor serves as a bridge between **linguistic form** and **cognitive structure**, influencing how information is mentally encoded and recalled. In English, metaphors contribute to[7]:

- categorization of experiences
- emotional framing
- narrative construction
- problem-solving and decision-making
- social and cultural interpretation

Because conceptual metaphors are deeply embedded in mental representation, they shape how speakers of English structure reality. For example, understanding **TIME AS MONEY** influences how English-speaking societies discuss productivity, efficiency, and personal scheduling.

4. Diagram: Conceptual Metaphor Processing Model

The following diagram illustrates how a metaphor is formed through cognitive processes[8]:



5. Summary of Theoretical Insights

- Conceptual metaphors structure abstract meaning through embodied experience.
- Mental representations store these structures as cognitive models that influence thought and language.
 - English metaphors are systematic and culturally shaped, not arbitrary.
 - The interaction between metaphor and mental representation plays a fundamental role in comprehension, communication, and learning.

The analysis of conceptual metaphor and mental representation in English demonstrates that metaphor is not a peripheral linguistic ornament but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals structure and interpret their experiences. Conceptual Metaphor Theory shows that abstract

concepts-such as time, emotion, reasoning, and human relationships-are systematically understood through concrete, embodied domains. This connection highlights the deep interaction between language and cognition, revealing how metaphor shapes perception, categorization, and communication.

The examined models and theoretical evidence confirm that mental representations play a crucial role in storing and activating metaphorical mappings. When speakers use metaphorical expressions, they rely on pre-existing cognitive schemas and culturally shared frames that guide interpretation. As a result, metaphor becomes both a linguistic and psychological tool that organizes thought and influences behavior.

Moreover, the study underscores that English metaphors are culturally embedded and reflect specific patterns of reasoning characteristic of English-speaking communities. Understanding these patterns not only enriches linguistic competence but also improves cross-cultural communication, translation, foreign language teaching, and discourse analysis.

In general, the integration of conceptual metaphor and mental representation provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how meaning is constructed and processed in the human mind. The findings of this research reaffirm the importance of cognitive linguistic approaches and offer valuable insights for further theoretical and applied studies in language, cognition, and communication.

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