

THE ROLE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN COGNITIVE RESEARCH: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the metaphors that permeate our ordinary everyday thoughts, speech, and actions. As a result, cognitive research on conceptual metaphors has promised a new "experimental" perspective on classical philosophical problems such as meaning, truth, rationality and the nature of logic. Metaphorical representations help to recognize one type of "experience" through another type of "experience." A more concrete and well-structured "experience" provides a basis for understanding a less clear "experience." Until recently, philosophers considered metaphor irrational and dangerous, assigning it a secondary status in the problem of language philosophy, thereby neglecting it. The metaphor was seen as the result of some operation on the literal meaning of words. The phenomenon of "conceptual metaphor," where the fundamental part of our conceptual system and everyday language is built on metaphorical expressions, either remained unnoticed or was not discussed at all. However, the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor distinguishes between poetic metaphor and understanding conceptual metaphor. According to the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor, while poetic metaphor is an integral part of figurative language, conceptual metaphor is a cognitive mechanism used to perceive a target concept, which is more concrete, easier to understand and also serves as the starting concept through the concept. The research applied general scientific methods, including comparison, observation, and description. Among the main linguistic techniques used in the study were functional methods, comparative-typological methods, comparisons, and content analysis techniques in specific situations. Based on the theory of conceptual metaphor and previous approaches, the article indicates that the use of conceptual metaphors can help to create epistemic motivation necessary for people to search for the meaning of life. Examples related to the conceptual metaphor "Life is a journey" in the article will find their opposite, and these examples will clarify the operational scheme of understanding the conceptual metaphor. In reality, life is not a journey, as important decisions that define a person's life can be made without taking a single step. However, this conceptual metaphor likens the journey of life to purposeful movement and connects this path to various aspects of life.

Keywords: Metaphor, Cognitive Linguistics, Philosophy, Concept

INTRODUCTION

The following uses of conceptual metaphor theory and philosophical hermeneutics will assist comparative philosophers in developing greater awareness in how we approach and integrate the veracity of conceptual metaphors into our own ideas. The idea that understanding prerequisites lie at the core of any interpretation is carried forward by philosophical hermeneutics. The "fore-structures" that underpin all interpretation are "fore-having," "fore-seeing," and "fore-conception," according to Martin Heidegger. The concept of a "horizon," which encompasses "prejudices" or "fore-judgments," is provided by Hans-Georg Gadamer and is the framework within which all interpretation occurs. These theorists outline the baseline

conditions necessary for everyone to engage the meaningful world and learn the facts about Being in an understanding manner.[1, p. 35]

In light of the evolution of metaphor theory over the previous fifty years, I want to draw attention to the role that metaphor use plays in both meaning production and this anticipatory backdrop. Metaphors are not merely decorative language; rather, research in conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), which emerged in response to Gadamer's fundamental hermeneutic writings, indicates that metaphors are involved in cognition, attitudes, and conduct. Embodied metaphors provide abstract concepts their conventional connotations and persuasive frameworks, which in turn shape our expectations of them. This implies that metaphors are conceptual frameworks that shape our perception and direct our interpretation by projecting their texture onto our surroundings. [1, p. 78]

The term "fore-metaphors" refers to metaphors that play a crucial role in interpretation, particularly in hermeneutics. These metaphors act as a bridge between different cultural perspectives, facilitating a merging of horizons. By exploring cross-cultural metaphors, especially significant ones from philosophy, we can undergo a profound transformation in our worldview.

To understand this process better, let's delve into the key concepts of philosophical hermeneutics. These include Heidegger's notions of "understanding," "fore-structures," and the "as structure" of interpretation, as well as Gadamer's ideas on "tradition," "translation," and the "fusion of horizons." This primer lays the groundwork for comprehending how interpretations are shaped and how encountering diverse metaphors can expand our understanding of the world. [1, p. 82]

Hermeneutics, traditionally concerned with interpretation, has historically been applied across various disciplines such as rhetoric, biblical studies, legal interpretation, literature, and history. However, in the twentieth century, it underwent a philosophical evolution, particularly through the work of Heidegger and Gadamer within phenomenology. These philosophers shifted hermeneutics towards ontology, the study of being and existence, by emphasizing the primordial situation of human existence. This transformation highlighted essential aspects of human experience, underscoring that our lives are deeply embedded within physical, historical, social, and linguistic contexts. These contexts not only shape our encounters with the world but also influence how we interpret it.

Crucially, this philosophical turn in hermeneutics alerts us to the unavoidable existential conditions that underpin human understanding. These include our finite nature, embodiment, historical situatedness, connection to tradition, and the use of language. Understanding these conditions is crucial as they fundamentally affect how we perceive and make sense of the world and its meaning.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Philosophical approach to conceptual metaphors

In this article, it becomes evident that achieving an ideal standpoint free from conditioning, completeness, disembodiment, or timelessness is unattainable. Instead, our understanding of Being emerges from our lived experience within the lifeworld, which we interpret within the framework of tradition. Heidegger proposes that all interpretations are rooted in and shaped by the possibilities projected onto the world by fore-structures of understanding. For Heidegger, "understanding" is the existential condition that underpins all meaningful human experience. He describes it not as a knowledge derived from cognition but

as a primordial mode of being that precedes and enables knowledge and cognition. This understanding is a way of comporting ourselves toward reality, where humans exist "understandingly." Every day, we awaken to a world that appears meaningful, coherent, and navigable, thanks to this primordial understanding.

The lifeworld humans inhabit is shaped and conditioned by this fundamental understanding. This approach to the world is structured by what Heidegger calls "fore-structures" of interpretation, which include "fore-having" (Vorhabe), "fore-seeing" (Vorsicht), and "fore-conception" (Vorgriff). These fore-structures are termed "fore" because they must always be active in consciousness prior to any explicit interpretation. They serve as presuppositions of discursive thinking, speaking, and reading, shaping our engagement with the world before we even begin to articulate our interpretations explicitly.

Fore-having represents the most encompassing aspect of possessing a lived experience within a lifeworld. Before engaging deliberately with reality and the world, there must exist an awareness of the world as familiar to a conscious human being, along with a fundamental ability to discern the nature and context of things. Heidegger emphasizes that every interpretation is fundamentally rooted in something we possess beforehand—in a fore-having. Fore-having entails possessing a specific interpretation that renders one's world intelligible and upon which one relies in everyday activities. It involves a relatively cohesive understanding of what things are, their purpose, and their relationships with each other. Fore-seeing involves focusing attention on particular issues of significance within the lifeworld, akin to directing a narrow line of sight or angle of approach. Objects of attention can only emerge within the field of attention, which is guided by specific concerns and perspectives. Fore-conception, or fore-grasping, refers to the repository of conceptual frameworks acquired through shared language and tradition, which provide categories and names for objects and patterns of experience. This conceptual intelligibility, encompassing expression and articulation, is termed as "fore-grasp" by Heidegger.[2, p. 191]

Our fundamental understanding of the world is primarily shaped by culture and language, but it can also be influenced by intentional education and cultivation. These three fore-structures—fore-having, fore-seeing, and fore-conception—are constantly at play simultaneously, yet they are nested within each other. Fore-having forms the basis for fore-seeing, and both fore-having and fore-seeing are presupposed in fore-conception. These fore-structures both enable and limit our ability to project what we can meaningfully encounter in the world.

Heidegger describes this preconditioning of meaningful possibilities as an anticipatory "projecting" of a world that will appear familiar and coherent according to familiar linguistic and cultural frameworks. This anticipation of meaning projected onto our experiences enables certain interpretations to emerge. These fore-structures and the understanding they facilitate are largely determined by cultural influences. Heidegger also emphasizes the existential reality of being in the world with others, asserting that the understanding of others is inherently intertwined with our understanding of "being." This suggests that our understanding of the world and of others is deeply interconnected and culturally mediated.

Because we are constantly immersed in social contexts and interactions with others, we often speak and understand in accordance with the norms and conventions of the collective, referred to as "Das Man" in Heidegger's philosophy. The understanding ingrained by one's cultural background is already embedded within the individual's comprehension. One's traditional conceptual framework serves as the backdrop and foundation for any specific engagement with the world.

Building upon Heidegger's ideas, Gadamer develops a more comprehensive hermeneutic theory. He conceptualizes the hermeneutic situation in terms of a "horizon" of meaning. A horizon, in this context, represents the comprehensive range of perspectives and interpretations that can be perceived from a particular vantage point. This term has been utilized in philosophy to illustrate how thought is bound by its finite determinacy and how one's range of understanding gradually expands over time.[2, p. 186]

The concept of a horizon encompasses what is visible, accessible, and potentially subject to interpretation. The metaphor of a horizon implies the extent of one's awareness, which can expand with experience but is ultimately bounded by limitations. While the horizon may stretch into the distance, there remains an insurmountable boundary. Horizons serve as existential fore-structures of understanding, both facilitating and restricting interpretation.

Gadamer provides only brief hints regarding his views on metaphor, yet these hints suggest a significant role for it. He suggests that transference from one sphere to another serves not only a logical function but also reflects the fundamental metaphorical nature of language. This implies that metaphor plays a crucial role in language and thought, facilitating the transfer of meaning across different domains and enriching our understanding of the world. This perspective positions metaphor as the foundational essence of language, facilitating the transfer of meaning between different realms. Gadamer suggests that language accomplishes a re-presentation of the subject matter, a transference that is essential for its explicit interpretation. Building upon Heidegger's assertion that "language is the house of Being" and Gadamer's statement that "Being that can be understood is language," the metaphorical nature inherent in language holds profound epistemological and ontological significance.

However, Gadamer did not delve further into the role of metaphor, leaving the question of its fundamental status to be explored by others. Consequently, subsequent developments have addressed this inquiry. Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary research endeavor spanning cognitive science, linguistics, mathematics, political science, philosophy, and more. Over the past four decades, a vast and often contentious body of literature has developed in this field. Here, I'll highlight some core concepts that are generally shared across various strands of CMT.

At its core, conceptual metaphor involves the transfer of structures and implications from one domain to another. This mapping typically extends from a concept rooted in concrete embodied experiences, known as the source domain, to a more abstract concept, referred to as the target domain. A classic example of this is the metaphor "LIFE IS A JOURNEY." To comprehend the concept of "life," we draw upon our implicit understanding of "journey"—what it entails and how it operates.[6, p. 237]

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide an analysis of this metaphor, which is reflected in everyday language through a wide range of expressions. Several mappings between the conceptual domains of life and journeys can be identified, such as:

- **Purpose and Destination:** Just as a journey has a purpose or destination, life is seen as having goals or aims.
- **Obstacles and Challenges:** Similar to obstacles encountered during a journey, life presents challenges and difficulties to overcome.
- **Progression:** Life, like a journey, is perceived as a series of stages or phases, with movement from one point to another.
- **Decision-making:** As in planning a journey, individuals make decisions and choices that shape the course of their lives.

Understanding the structure of this metaphor involves recognizing these correspondences between the domains of life and journeys. This analysis demonstrates how metaphorical mappings contribute to our conceptualization and understanding of abstract concepts through the lens of more concrete experiences.

- The person leading a life is a traveler.
- His purposes are destinations.
- The means for achieving purposes are routes.
- Difficulties in life are impediments to travel.
- Counselors are guides.
- Progress is the distance traveled.
- Things you gauge your progress by are landmarks.
- Choices in life are crossroads.
- Material resources and talents are provisions.

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) suggests that metaphors aren't just linguistic embellishments; they shape how we approach and conduct arguments. The metaphorical transfer from "life" to "journey" can be explicitly mapped by identifying structural similarities between the two domains. This coherent mapping illustrates how meanings and structural relations are transferred between domains, enabling us to understand the advantage conferred by the metaphor. CMT no longer views metaphor as an occasional rhetorical flourish but as pervasive in both language and thought. The traditional Aristotelian distinction between literal and figurative language is considered outdated because everyday communication is saturated with metaphors.

CMT asserts that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a cognitive structure that influences how we conceive of the world and behave within it. Research in this field has demonstrated the cross-cultural prevalence of cognitive metaphors as a universal human capacity. Metaphor is pervasive in human discourse, whether in discussions of everyday matters or in exploring fundamental philosophical topics such as time, cause and effect, knowledge, morality, and so on. [4, p. 268]

Conceptual metaphor theory, alongside reviewed evidence, suggests that metaphor usage aids individuals in fulfilling the epistemic motive to find meaning in life. Take, for instance, the metaphor "life is a journey." While life isn't literally a journey, this metaphor draws upon our knowledge of goal-directed motion acquired through routine bodily activity and applies it to aspects of life. By mapping this knowledge onto life, individuals perceive themselves as travelers, their life goals as destinations, and the means of achieving those goals as paths. This metaphor structures various aspects of life, such as understanding difficulties as obstacles along the way.

Notably, some elements of journey knowledge, like travel insurance or carpools, do not conventionally participate in this mapping. This aligns with the theory that metaphor operates as a partial mapping, highlighting certain target elements while downplaying others, distinguishing it from a mere similarity relation. Metaphors provide structure where it might otherwise be lacking, bringing together disparate aspects of life into a cohesive framework.

Further support for the impact of metaphor on perceptions of meaning comes from studies showing that primed metaphors can influence perceptions related to self and identity. For instance, individuals may metaphorically represent their intrinsic self-concept as a core-like

entity inside a container representing their public self-concept. Exposure to pictorial primes of an emerging core-like object led participants to feel more strongly that their "real" self is valuable, independent of social approval. Activation of metaphor can enhance perceptions of continuity in experiences and identities across time. In a study, students exposed to imagery framing an academic goal as a destination on a journey applied their experience with motion along paths to visualize how this distant-future goal connects to present academic activities. Consequently, they became more motivated to work hard in their classes to achieve their future self. Similarly, priming a journey metaphor reinforced participants' perception that separate events from their past fit into a meaningful progression culminating in their current self-concept. This effect was particularly evident when participants felt uncertain about their current self-concept, suggesting that metaphor usage is influenced by epistemic motivations.

Previous studies indicate that experimentally primed metaphors support understanding of abstract aspects of self and identity, such as the "true" self and the relationship between temporally remote actions and outcomes. Additionally, these studies highlight the moderating role of uncertainty: individuals are more likely to utilize a metaphor to organize their self-concept when they lack a clear, confident understanding of themselves. However, if their self-views already feel certain, they are less inclined to employ accessible metaphors to comprehend themselves and their experiences.

METHODOLOGY

One implication of CMT is that the pursuit of a purely literal description of the world and human life is unattainable. Much of philosophy has been concerned with seeking truth understood as a literal representation of the actual state of affairs. However, if cognition and language do not operate on the basis of literal representation, then our aims and methods in philosophy need to shift accordingly.

Johnson succinctly summarizes the challenge CMT presents to philosophy: "If you acknowledge conceptual metaphor, then you have to give up literalism. If you give up literalism, you must abandon objectivist theories of knowledge. If you reject objectivist metaphysics and epistemology, you must abandon the classical correspondence theory of truth." This underscores the profound implications of conceptual metaphor theory for philosophical inquiry, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional assumptions about truth and knowledge. Johnson suggests that the practice of philosophy should involve analyzing, critiquing, and elaborating upon the metaphorical concepts that underpin philosophical systems. Attending to philosophically significant metaphors offers a productive pathway into essential philosophical inquiries. This model of philosophy, focused on interpreting metaphor, can be effectively employed in cross-cultural settings, reshaping our approach to philosophical exploration. [3, p. 42]

However, prior research has not assessed metaphor's potential impact on overall perceptions of meaning in life or whether epistemic motivation influences people's use of metaphors to conceptualize life as a whole. Furthermore, previous studies have focused on the effects of provided metaphors, such as the "inner core," which may have influenced self-perceptions simply due to their familiarity in everyday language. The current studies address these gaps by examining not only the conventional journey metaphor but also self-chosen metaphors that may be more individualized.

CONCLUSION

CMT highlights the role of the body in all cognitive processes. Interpreting metaphors requires consideration of embodied experiences and schemas that serve as sources for our most deeply ingrained primary metaphors. Bodily experiences such as seeing clearly in daylight, being pushed and pulled, grasping objects, and walking forward provide foundations for our understanding of core philosophical concepts. The body constantly influences our thinking, shaping even our most abstract philosophical ideas. Universal features of human embodiment, such as experiencing better vision in daylight than at night, offer common sources of metaphors and the potential for shared human meaning, knowledge, and ethics.

However, while experiential similarities provide touchstones for cross-cultural exchange, they do not negate the need to recognize foreign meanings that may not align with familiar implications. It's essential to acknowledge the influence of cultural contingencies on metaphorical meanings. Cultural differences can lead to variations in the use and interpretation of embodied metaphors, and specific metaphors may be rooted in local practices without direct equivalents in other cultures' languages. Cultural factors also shape which metaphors are emphasized, influencing our conceptualization of the world.

Metaphor goes beyond mere wordplay; it encompasses behavior and deeply influences how we interpret and exist within the world. Conceptual metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices; they are integral to our understanding and engagement with reality.

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