

METAPHORS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE LANGUAGE SYSTEM

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Abstract: This article analyzes the role of metaphor in the language system, its semantic and cognitive nature, and its functional significance in speech. The paper examines historical interpretations of metaphor — from Aristotle to modern cognitive approaches — and compares its rhetorical and conceptual perspectives. Various types of metaphors, such as visual, absolute, complex, root, conceptual, dead, and mixed metaphors, are illustrated with examples. Furthermore, the cognitive, communicative, and pragmatic functions of metaphors, as well as their cultural and semantic meanings, are explored.

Keywords: metaphor, semantics, cognitive linguistics, transference of meaning, conceptual system, imagery in speech, language and thought.

Introduction

Language, as the most important means of human thought, perception, and expression of the world, represents an integral part of human culture. Through language, people share their thoughts, emotions, experiences, imaginations, and knowledge about the world. In this regard, metaphor holds a special place as one of the most ancient and effective semantic phenomena in language. Metaphor serves as a universal mechanism of human cognition, creative thinking, and meaning-making, forming new conceptualizations. It is used not only in artistic speech but also actively functions in everyday communication, scientific, political, and philosophical discourse.

From Aristotle's time onward, the notion of metaphor has been widely studied in linguistics, philosophy, aesthetics, and cognitive sciences. Initially regarded as a rhetorical device, metaphor is now interpreted in modern linguistics as a cognitive process — one of the fundamental mechanisms of human thinking. Thus, studying metaphor today provides deeper insights into the semantic system of language, as well as its cognitive, communicative, and cultural functions.

Relevance of the Topic

In today's era of globalization and intercultural communication, the importance of metaphors is growing. They serve not only as artistic means of expression but also as reflections of human thought and culture, enriching language and contributing to the emergence of new meanings. Metaphors help express abstract concepts through concrete imagery, simplify complex ideas, and make speech more vivid and expressive. They are also essential for analyzing cultural and conceptual differences between nations and for understanding the national and cultural characteristics of language.

Currently, the study of conceptual foundations, types, and cultural meanings of metaphors has become one of the central directions in cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies. Therefore, analyzing metaphors at lexical, phraseological, and conceptual levels is crucial for revealing the relationship between language and thought.

Methodology

This study is based on the semantic and cognitive approaches in linguistics, employing the following scientific methods:

1. **Cognitive-linguistic analysis** – to determine the role of metaphor in human cognition and conceptual systems, and to explain its function in meaning-making.
2. **Semantic analysis** – to identify semantic changes that occur during metaphorical transference of meaning and to analyze the bases of similarity, analogy, and functional commonality.
3. **Comparative (contrastive) method** – to compare metaphorical expressions across different languages and cultures, revealing universal and national-specific features.
4. **Discourse analysis** – to explore how metaphors function in different types of discourse (literary, political, scientific, and media).
5. **Descriptive method** – to explain types, structures, and semantic features of metaphors based on actual language examples.

These methods collectively help to reveal the linguistic nature, functional role, and cognitive significance of metaphor in human thought.

Theoretical Background

Transferred meaning arises when a word's lexical meaning extends to a new referent in the objective world due to association or similarity. In this case, the secondary meaning is called a **metaphor**. Since ancient times, metaphor has attracted great interest among scholars. Consequently, various approaches emerged, dividing metaphor studies into **rhetorical (traditional)** and **cognitive (modern)** schools.

The history of traditional metaphor, or the "science of metaphor," dates back from **Aristotle to I.A. Richards**. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, metaphor (more precisely, "epiphora") was defined as a rhetorical device, and ever since, it has remained a subject of deep interest. Aristotle described metaphor as: "A metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or on the ground of analogy."

Metaphor is not merely a stylistic ornament of literature, but a **universal cognitive mechanism** of meaning creation. It enriches language on lexical, phraseological, grammatical, and discursive levels, forming a core element of the semantic system.

From a linguistic perspective, metaphor is a **semantic shift** that transfers the name of one object or phenomenon to another based on similarity or analogy. For example, in the phrase "time

flies”, time does not literally move, but human cognition perceives its passage metaphorically as flight. Metaphors thus play an essential role in cognitive, communicative, and pragmatic aspects of language use — helping to conceptualize reality, enhance emotional impact, and increase expressiveness across genres of discourse.

Types of Metaphors

1. **Visual Metaphor** – conveys ideas through visual imagery, creating vivid pictures in the reader’s mind.
Example: “Her eyes were shining diamonds.”
2. **Absolute Metaphor** – presents only one side of the comparison, omitting explicit markers of similarity, giving the expression a strong emotional effect.
Example: “His heart was stone.”
3. **Complex Metaphor** – combines multiple metaphorical elements to convey layered meanings. *Example:* “Her bow-shaped brows, emerald eyes, and rose lips could stun any man at a glance.”
4. **Root Metaphor** – deeply embedded in cultural or social beliefs, shaping how people conceptualize the world.
5. *Example:* “Life is but a blink of an eye.” **Conceptual Metaphor** – helps understand one concept in terms of another.
Example: “Inner peace is priceless.”
6. **Dead Metaphor** – so commonly used that its figurative meaning has faded into everyday language. *Examples:* “Time is money.” – “Life flows like a river.”
7. **Mixed Metaphor** – arises when incompatible metaphors are illogically combined.
Example: “Her bright eyes burned with sorrow.”

Conclusion

Metaphors occupy an important place in the language system because they **expand vocabulary, clarify concepts, and increase expressiveness and compactness** of language. They extend the potential of linguistic expression, add emotional and imaginative depth, and contribute to language development by generating new meanings.

As Aristotle noted in *Rhetoric*: “Metaphor gives clarity, charm, and distinction to speech, and its appropriate use is a mark of genius.”

Thus, metaphors are not only decorative elements of language but essential tools for **concept formation, communication, and cognitive reflection** — serving as active forces in the dynamic evolution of language.

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