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THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR "DISEASE IS WAR" AND ITS MAJOR MAPPINGS

Abstract

From the very beginning, conceptual metaphor has been one of the interest areas in Cognitive linguistics and an integral part of cognitive linguistics theory. Among other things, this linguistic approach deals with the motivation of conceptual metaphors, their cultural specificity, conventionality, and the question of whether it is a well-established structure of knowledge or a process. Metaphor is not just a rhetorical device, but something we use in everyday communication, and after a brief overview of the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor through the metaphor DISEASE IS WAR, specific examples from the English and B/H/S language extracted from the Google browser will be analyzed.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, domain, disease, war, mapping

Introduction

It is by metaphor that language grows.
- Julian Jaynes

When we think about metaphors, one of the first ideas which come to our mind is that it is a language mostly used by poets and rhetoricians, not by ordinary people in everyday language. However, this impression seems to be wrong because the language we use for everyday communication is full of metaphors.

As Lakoff and Johnson argue (1980: 3), "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature". This means that metaphors reflect our cognitive reasoning and we constantly use them.

Conceptual metaphor – what is it?

Cognitive linguistics has been dealing with *conceptual metaphor* since its very beginnings, dating back to one of the most prominent and influential theories concerning metaphors - *The Conceptual Theory of Metaphor* proposed by George P. Lakoff and Mark L. Johnson in their book *Metaphors we live by* (1980) which provided a completely new perspective on metaphor and changed the way linguists had thought about it. The basic proposition of this theory is that metaphor is not simply a rhetorical and stylistic language device, but that the nature of thought itself is metaphorical. Since then, within the framework of cognitive theory, the conceptual metaphor has been fully accepted.

The central characteristic of conceptual metaphor is that it is based on the relationship between the two conceptual domains - *source domain* and *target domain*, meaning that we understand one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain - *conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B* (Kövecses, 2010: 4).

Given the fact that conceptual metaphor as a cognitive ability is reflected in language, we need to differentiate between a *metaphorical linguistic expression* and a *conceptual metaphor* which are basically two sides of the same coin.

According to Kövecses (2010: 7), "the linguistic expressions (i.e., ways of talking) make explicit, or are manifestations of, the conceptual metaphors (i.e., ways of thinking)" or to be more specific "the metaphorical linguistic expressions reveal the existence of conceptual metaphors."

Let us look at the following examples:

- (1) *Studies in these organoids are revealing the virus's versatility at **invading** organs, from the lungs to the liver, kidneys and gut.*¹
- (2) *When germs, such as bacteria or viruses, **invade** the body, they **attack** and multiply.*²
- (3) *The urgent pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to develop and identify effective medication therapy strategies to **combat** the COVID-19.*³
- (4) *Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that helps your immune system **fight** cancer.*⁴

Expressions from (1) to (4) are metaphorical because various actions and procedures are described as warfare, i.e. WAR. The source domain WAR is indicated by expressions (1-4) such as *invade*, *attack*, *combat*, *fight*. However, *virus's versatility* (1), *germs, bacteria, viruses* (2), *effective medication therapy strategies* (3) and *immunotherapy* (4) have nothing to do with WAR, but still, through them WAR as a more concrete phenomenon maps to the target domain DISEASE as a more abstract phenomenon. In this way, we can establish the conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS WAR which represents an abbreviated form of a set of mappings from the source to the target domain (e.g. disease is an enemy, therapy strategies are war strategies, etc.).

When we talk about conceptual metaphors, it is also important to mention another characteristic – *unidirectionality*. This means that a metaphorical mapping is structured from a source domain to a target domain, but not the other way around.

Evans and Green (2006: 296) show this principle through the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY stating that "while we conceptualize LOVE in terms of JOURNEYS, we cannot conventionally structure JOURNEYS in terms of LOVE: travelers are not conventionally described as 'lovers', or car crashes in terms of 'heartbreak', and so on."

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), this unidirectional nature of mapping stays even when two different metaphors share the same domains. They mentioned two metaphors: PEOPLE ARE MACHINES and MACHINES ARE PEOPLE. Although these two metaphors seem very similar or exactly the same at first glance, their mappings are completely different. In the first metaphor, PEOPLE ARE MACHINES, the characteristics related to computers are mapped onto people, whereas in the second metaphor MACHINES ARE PEOPLE it is "the notion of desire and volition that is mapped onto the machine" (Evans and Green, 2006: 297).

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01864-x> (accessed August 22, 2020)

² <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/conversations/understanding-vacc-work.html> (accessed August 22, 2020)

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17512433.2020.1805315> (accessed August 22, 2020)

⁴ <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/types> (accessed August 22, 2020)

Types of conceptual metaphor

According to Kövecses (2010), conceptual metaphors can be classified according to the cognitive functions they perform, thus distinguishing three general types of conceptual metaphors - *structural*, *ontological*, and *orientational*.

In *structural metaphors*, the source domain provides a fairly rich knowledge of the structure of the target domain. In other words, the cognitive function of these metaphors is to allow the speaker to understand the target domain through the structure of the source domain. This understanding occurs through the mapping of elements between the source and target domains (e.g. DISEASE IS WAR).

Ontological metaphors enable the understanding of abstract concepts and experiences in the form of objects, substances, or containers. They allow the observation of a structure where it is almost or completely non-existent (e.g. THE MIND IS A CONTAINER).

Orientational metaphors are metaphors mostly related to basic human spatial relationships, i.e. they "give a concept a spatial orientation" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 14). Their cognitive task is, as Kövecses explains (2010: 40) "to make a set of target concepts coherent in our conceptual system" (e.g. HAPPY IS UP).

The partial nature of metaphorical mappings

As it was mentioned before, conceptual metaphors can be understood through formulation $A = B$ (A – target domain, B - source domain), but this kind of formulation is not precise enough, so we have to mention the processes of *hiding* and *highlighting* which are another important feature observed in the *Conceptual Theory of Metaphor*.

According to Evans and Green (2006: 303), "when a target is structured in terms of a particular source, this highlights certain aspects of the target while simultaneously hiding other aspects." Kövecses (2010: 91) shows this nature of conceptual metaphors through the metaphor THE MIND IS A BRITTLE OBJECT, stating, in this case, that "metaphorical source domain focuses on a single aspect of the concept of the mind", i.e. "the main focus is on the aspect that we can call „psychological strength”—or, in this case, the lack of it", concluding that "when a metaphor focuses on one or some aspects of a target concept, we can say that it highlights that or those aspect(s)." Naturally, if certain aspects of the source domain are highlighted, then some aspects remain hidden, which is out of focus. So, we can say that these two processes presuppose each other, mapping only certain aspects of the source domain to the target domain.

The conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS WAR and its metaphorical expressions

War is a term we use to denote one of the most distinctive human experiences, which is the reason for its frequent use in the metaphorical structuring of other experiences. For example, Kövecses (2010: 85) wonders why the notion of war is such a good (i.e. natural) source domain for the target concept in the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR stating that the probable reason is that "the verbal institution of arguments has evolved historically from the physical domain of fighting. Thus, the historical origin of the concept of argument (i.e. war or fighting) became a

natural source domain for the target that has evolved from that origin (i.e. argument)". The notion of disease through war may seem particularly self-evident, since at the core of both are experiences of human suffering manifesting in everyday metaphorical linguistic expressions.

DISEASE IS WAR represents a common conceptual metaphor whose metaphorical linguistic expressions are used not only by doctors but also by those who are not involved in the world of medicine. Since a disease includes innumerable chemical processes inside the human body that cannot be seen directly, the source domain of war is often used to explain the concept of fighting a disease.

First of all, disease is understood as a foreign entity that infiltrates the body by attacking it in precisely defined places, and which needs to be located and removed. The main, active role is played by doctors which are seen as military strategists focused on the battle with the disease, while patients are passive and reduced to a body seen as the battlefield on which the battle takes place. Technology is once again taking on a key role - this time as a weapon in the fight against diseases whose use is explicitly controlled by doctors.

So, the metaphor DISEASE IS WAR belongs to the group of structural metaphors, meaning that one concept is metaphorically constructed by another concept. In the metaphor DISEASE IS WAR, a more abstract concept of DISEASE is structured by some other more concrete concept - the concept of WAR, all because typical activities in war are attacking and defending, which can also apply to illustrate disease, so these two different concepts become merged into a structural metaphor.

As in English, many metaphorical expressions emerged from this conceptual metaphor in B/H/S, being common in medical discourse and texts related to medicine:

- (5) *Cancerous tumors are malignant, which means they can spread into, or **invade**, nearby tissues.*⁵
- (6) *Although the immune system normally removes damaged or abnormal cells from the body, some **cancer cells are able to "hide" from the immune system.***⁶
- (7) *One type of T cell is called a cytotoxic T cell because it **kills** cells that are infected with viruses with toxic mediators.*⁷
- (8) *Firstly, the antibodies **neutralise** the virus, meaning that it is no longer capable of infecting the host cell.*⁸
- (9) *Kako se menjala **strategija borbe protiv korona virusa** tokom mesec dana?*⁹

⁵ <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/understanding/what-is-cancer> (accessed August 25, 2020)

⁶ <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/understanding/what-is-cancer> (accessed August 25, 2020)

⁷ <https://www.immunology.org/public-information/bitesized-immunology/pathogens-and-disease/immune-responses-viruses> (accessed August 25, 2020)

⁸ <https://www.immunology.org/public-information/bitesized-immunology/pathogens-and-disease/immune-responses-viruses> (accessed August 25, 2020)

⁹ <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/kako-se-menjala-strategija-borbe-protiv-korona-virusa-tokom-mesec-dana/> (accessed August 25, 2020)

- (10) *Osoblje na prvoj liniji odbrane u bolnicama, uključujući lekare, medicinske sestre i tehničare i logističko osoblje moraju da žive u uslovima izolacije i izolaciju ne smeju da napuštaju bez posebne dozvole.*¹⁰
- (11) *Mišićna distrofija je progresivna, nasljedna bolest koja uništava mišiće koji kontroliraju pokrete pa oni propadaju i slabe.*¹¹
- (12) *Imunološka kompromitovanost je termin koji označava smanjenu sposobnost organizma, tj. imunog sistema da pruži adekvatan odgovor na invaziju patogenih mikroorganizama i drugih štetnih materija.*¹²

In everyday linguistic expressions, in communication within medical practice, and even in professional medical terminology: we can win or lose the battle with the disease, the disease attacks us when our immune defense system is weakened, we use aggressive or invasive treatments.

Based on the aforementioned examples, the thing which well connects the elements of WAR and the elements of DISEASE is the major theme that is mapped from the source domain WAR to the target domain DISEASE. The process of curing disease is a battle. The disease should be cured to guarantee the preservation of health just as soldiers should defeat the enemy to preserve the land from invasion.

Each source domain has a main meaning focus (major theme) which can be mapped onto the target and the major theme reflects how concrete source domain is used to understand a target domain (Kövecses 2010: 138).

Source: <i>WAR</i>	Target: <i>DISEASE</i>
enemy	disease
soldiers	doctors and nurses
weapons	medicine
battleground	body
winning a war	curing a disease
losing a war	failing in treatment
strategies in a war	strategies of treating a disease

Table 1 – *Set of mappings in the conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS WAR*

Conclusion

Being one of the most prominent and influential theories concerning metaphor, the *Conceptual Theory of Metaphor* proposed by George P. Lakoff and Mark L. Johnson in their book *Metaphors we live by* (1980) provided a completely new perspective on metaphor and changed the way linguists had thought about it.

¹⁰ http://medf.kg.ac.rs/oglasna_tabla/Handbook_of_COVID-19_Prevention_and_Treatment_Srpski.pdf (accessed August 25, 2020)

¹¹ <https://udtk.org/misicna-distrofija/> (accessed August 25, 2020)

¹² <https://www.stetoskop.info/zdravlje-mladih/imuni-sistem--temelj-odbrane-ljudskog-organizma> (accessed August 25, 2020)

In the cognitive approach to language, metaphor refers to the understanding of one concept in terms of another, i.e. *conceptual domains*, where a more concrete phenomenon (*source domain*) maps to a more abstract phenomenon (*target domain*). These systematic mappings between two broad domains are called *conceptual metaphors*, and they are useful for understanding complex ideas in simple terms and therefore are frequently used to give insights into abstract theories and models. An interesting characteristic of conceptual metaphors is *unidirectionality*, meaning that a metaphorical mapping is structured from a source domain to a target domain, but not the other way around, and what Evans and Green (2006: 296) have shown through the example of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY. Although conceptual metaphors can be understood through formulation $A = B$ (A – target domain, B - source domain), this kind of formulation is not precise enough. Processes of *hiding* and *highlighting* are another important feature observed in the *Conceptual Theory of Metaphor*, meaning when a target is defined through a specific source, this highlights certain characteristics of the target, and hides other characteristics at the same time.

Based on the cognitive functions these metaphors perform, three general types of conceptual metaphors can be distinguished - *structural*, *ontological*, and *orientational*. The one analyzed in this paper – DISEASE IS WAR belongs to the group of structural metaphors in which one concept (target domain: DISEASE) is metaphorically constructed by another concept (source domain: WAR). Although conceptual metaphors are not linguistic in nature, they are realized by dozens of linguistic expressions which we have analyzed through the examples in English and B/H/S language, showing that the thing which well connects the elements of WAR and the elements of DISEASE is the major theme which is mapped from the source domain WAR to the target domain DISEASE (e.g. we can *win* or *lose the battle* with the disease, the disease *attacks* us when our immune *defense* system is weakened, we use *aggressive* or *invasive* treatments).

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KONCEPTUALNA METAFORA " BOLEST JE RAT " I NJENA GLAVNA PRESLIKAVANJA

Sažetak

Od samog početka, konceptualna metafora bila je jedno od područja interesa kognitivne lingvistike i sastavni dio njene teorije. Između ostalog, ovaj lingvistički pristup bavi se motivacijom konceptualnih metafora, njihovom kulturnom specifičnošću, konvencionalnošću i pitanjem da li je u pitanju čvrsto uspostavljena struktura znanja ili proces. Metafora nije samo retorička figura, već nešto što koristimo u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji, a nakon kratkog pregleda Teorije konceptualne metafore kroz metaforu BOLEST JE RAT analiziraćemo konkretne primjere iz engleskog i B/H/S jezika ekstrahirane sa Google pretraživača.

Ključne riječi: kognitivna lingvistika, konceptualna metafora, domena, bolest, rat, preslikavanje