

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR WITH THE TARGET DOMAIN DEATH/СМЕРТЬ IN THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

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**Annotatsiya.** Mazkur tadqiqot ingliz va rus tillaridagi onlayn gazeta nekrologlarida o'lim tushunchasining evfemistik metaforalar orqali ifodalanishini kognitiv-lingvistik yondashuv asosida tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot J. Lakoff va M. Johnsonning kontseptual metafora nazariyasiga tayangan holda, o'limning SAYOHAT, UYQU/DAM Olish, QAYTA UCHRASHUV va YAKUNIY MANZIL kabi metaforik modellar orqali qanday kontseptuallashtirilishini o'rganadi. Tadqiqot materiali 2021 yilda e'lon qilingan 280 ta nekrologdan iborat bo'lib, ular ingliz va rus tillarida teng miqdorda tanlangan. Tadqiqotda metaforik ifodalarni aniqlash, ularning chastotasini hisoblash va tillararo taqqoslash uchun miqdoriy va sifat jihatidan tahlil usullari qo'llanildi. Natijalar har ikkala til korpusida ham o'lim tushunchasi ko'pincha evfemistik metaforalar orqali ifodalanishini ko'rsatadi. Tadqiqot metaforaning madaniy va kognitiv vosita sifatidagi ahamiyatini tasdiqlaydi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** kontseptual metafora, evfemizm, o'lim, nekrolog matni, kognitiv lingvistika, ingliz va rus tillari

**Аннотация.** В данной работе рассматриваются эвфемистические метафоры, используемые для концептуализации смерти в английских и русских интернет-некрологах с позиции когнитивной лингвистики. Исследование опирается на теорию концептуальной метафоры Дж. Лакоффа и М. Джонсона и анализирует, каким образом смерть осмысливается через такие метафорические модели, как ПУТЕШЕСТВИЕ, СОН/ПОКОЙ, ВОССОЕДИНЕНИЕ и КОНЕЧНЫЙ ПУНКТ. Материал исследования включает 280 некрологов, опубликованных в 2021 году, поровну представленных в английском и русском корпусах. В работе используются количественные и качественные методы анализа для выявления метафорических выражений, определения их частотности и сопоставления концептуальных моделей в двух языках. Результаты показывают, что эвфемистические метафоры значительно преобладают над прямыми упоминаниями смерти, что подтверждает табуированный характер данной темы. При этом выявляются как универсальные, так и культурно обусловленные различия в метафорической репрезентации смерти.

**Ключевые слова:** концептуальная метафора, эвфемизм, смерть, некролог, когнитивная лингвистика, английский и русский языки

**Abstract.** This study examines euphemistic metaphors used to conceptualize death in English and Russian online newspaper obituaries from a cognitive-linguistic perspective. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research analyses how death is framed through metaphorical mappings such as JOURNEY, SLEEP/REST, REUNITING/JOINING, and FINAL LOCATION/END. The corpus consists of 280 obituary texts published in 2021, evenly divided between English and Russian sources. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed to identify metaphorical expressions, calculate their frequency, and compare their distribution across languages. The findings demonstrate that euphemistic metaphors significantly outnumber direct references to death in both corpora, highlighting the taboo nature of the concept. While the metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE dominates in both languages, notable cross-linguistic differences are observed in the use of other conceptual mappings, reflecting culturally specific models of death and mourning. The study confirms that metaphor functions as a crucial cognitive and cultural tool in negotiating socially sensitive topics.

**Key words:** *conceptual metaphor, euphemism, death, obituary discourse, cognitive linguistics, English and Russian languages*

**Introduction.** Death is a universal human experience, yet it remains one of the most linguistically and culturally sensitive topics. Across languages and cultures, direct references to death are often avoided or mitigated through indirect means, particularly euphemism and metaphor. These linguistic strategies allow speakers to address mortality while reducing emotional discomfort and adhering to social norms governing politeness and mourning. As a result, death-related discourse offers a valuable site for examining the interaction between language, cognition, and culture.

**Theoretical review.** Cognitive linguistics has fundamentally revised the traditional understanding of metaphor as a purely decorative or poetic device. Rather than being limited to stylistic embellishment, metaphor is now viewed as a central mechanism of human cognition that structures everyday thinking, reasoning, and linguistic behaviour. As Lakoff and Johnson emphasize, metaphor is “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” [Lakoff & Johnson, 3]. This cognitive function of metaphor is particularly evident in the conceptualization of abstract, emotionally charged phenomena such as DEATH.

This work investigates euphemistic metaphors related to DEATH/СМЕРТЬ in English and Russian online newspaper obituaries. An obituary is understood here as “a notice of a death, especially in a newspaper, typically including a brief biography of the deceased person” [Oxford Dictionary, s.v. *obituary*]. In Russian, this genre is commonly referred to as *некролог*, defined as “an article published in connection with someone’s death containing information about the life and activity of the deceased” [Толковый словарь русского языка, 349]. The analysis is grounded in Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980) and aims to identify and compare the dominant metaphorical conceptualizations of DEATH in the two languages.

Understanding the use of conventional metaphors in obituary discourse is essential, as such metaphors reveal how speakers cognitively and culturally frame DEATH. Since DEATH is an abstract and taboo topic, metaphor and euphemism play a crucial role in making it communicable while reducing emotional discomfort. As Allan and Burridge note, euphemism functions as a strategy for avoiding direct reference to socially sensitive concepts and for maintaining interpersonal harmony [Allan & Burridge, 1].

**Methodology.** To explore the use of death-related euphemistic metaphors, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The frequency of euphemistic metaphors and the distribution of their underlying conceptual mappings were calculated using percentages, and the results are discussed in relation to the research questions.

The corpus data were extracted from two online platforms publishing obituary texts, each representing one language. English obituaries were collected from *funeralnotices.com*, while Russian obituaries were taken from *necrology.com*. In total, 280

obituaries were analysed, with 140 texts in each language. This equal distribution was necessary to ensure comparability between the corpora. All obituaries date from the year 2021, allowing for the inclusion of texts from all seasons of the year. To ensure randomization, every fifth English obituary and every third Russian obituary were selected.

All texts were manually downloaded, numbered, and analysed. Subsequently, all death-related expressions were identified and labelled. Since the objective of the study was not only to identify conceptual metaphors but also to examine their euphemistic function, both metaphorical and non-metaphorical expressions were included. These included explicit references such as *death*, *die*, *dead* in English and *умер*, *погиб* in Russian.

To ensure consistency in identification, the following guiding questions were applied:

1. Is the expression metaphorical in nature, that is, is the target domain DEATH conceptualized in terms of another domain?
2. Does the expression function as a periphrastic substitute for direct references to death?

When uncertainty arose, these questions served as the primary criteria for classification. The following examples illustrate the identification process:

A. *Sadly, departed peacefully on 29th Nov 2021.* (Eng56)

B. *18 августа 2021 года... ушла из жизни народная артистка...* (Rus71)

In both cases, DEATH is conceptualized in terms of departure, corresponding to the conceptual metaphor **DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE**. These expressions function euphemistically by replacing direct references to DEATH with less emotionally charged alternatives.

Some exceptions were treated with particular care. Expressions such as *goodnight* or *goodbyes* do not directly substitute taboo terms, yet they reflect metaphorical conceptualizations of DEATH as sleep or departure. Following cognitive-semantic principles, these expressions were classified as symbolic euphemistic metaphors representing mappings such as **DEATH IS SLEEP** or **DEATH IS A JOURNEY**.

The study adopts a top-down analytical approach typical of cognitive linguistic research. As Crespo-Fernández explains, this approach involves selecting linguistic data, identifying patterns, and subsequently reconstructing underlying conceptual structures [Crespo-Fernández, 99]. This method allows for systematic testing of conceptual metaphor hypotheses and facilitates cross-linguistic comparison.

### Results and Discussion

The following section presents the distribution of conceptual metaphors and euphemistic expressions related to DEATH/СМЕРТЬ in English and Russian obituary corpora. In addition to metaphorical expressions, the number of direct references to taboo words such as *death* and *умер* was also recorded, as illustrated below:

A. *It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of Pat...*

B. *19 августа 2021 года... умер заслуженный артист...*

A comparison of direct references and euphemistic metaphors demonstrates a clear preference for euphemistic metaphorical expressions in both languages. The frequency distribution is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Frequency of euphemistic metaphors and direct use of taboo words**

	English obituaries frequency		Russian obituaries frequency	
	Use of euphemistic metaphors	121	80,6%	125
Direct use of taboo words	29	19,3%	15	10,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data indicate that euphemistic metaphors dominate obituary discourse in both English and Russian, confirming the hypothesis that DEATH/CMEPTЬ is a highly euphemized concept.

All metaphorical expressions were subsequently classified according to their conceptual mappings. The frequency and percentage distribution of these mappings are presented in **Tables 2 and 3**. The most frequent conceptual metaphors include **DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE**, **DEATH IS SLEEP/REST**, **DEATH IS A REUNITING/JOINING**, and **DEATH IS A FINAL LOCATION/END**.

**Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution of conceptual mappings in both corpora**

Conceptual metaphors	English obituaries		Russian obituaries	
	<b>DEATH IS JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE</b>	66	54,5%	68
<b>DEATH IS A REST/SLEEP</b>	38	31,4%	0	0
<b>DEATH IS A REUNITING/JOINING</b>	12	9,8%	0	0
<b>DEATH IS A FINAL LOCATION/END</b>	0	0	48	38,4%
<b>DEATH IS A LOSS</b>	3	2,4%	0	0
<b>DEATH IS A CHARACTER</b>	3	2,4%	4	3,2%
<b>DEATH IS A DEPARTURE OF A PERSON</b>	3	2,4%	0	0
<b>Other</b>	0	0	5	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Overview of English Obituaries

A total of 121 euphemistic expressions were identified in the English corpus. The dominant conceptual metaphors were **DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE**, **DEATH IS SLEEP/REST**, and **DEATH IS A REUNITING/JOINING**. These mappings reflect culturally entrenched ways of mitigating the emotional impact of death.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage distribution of conceptual mappings in the English data

Conceptual metaphors	Frequency of euphemistic expressions	Total	%
<b>DEATH IS JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE</b>	<i>Departed peacefully (1)</i> <i>Departed this life (1)</i> <i>Passed away (13)</i> <i>Slipped away (1)</i> <i>Sadly passed away (5)</i> <i>Tragically passed away (1)</i> <i>Passed away sadly (1)</i> <i>Passed away suddenly (2)</i> <i>Passed away peacefully (21)</i> <i>Peacefully passed away (5)</i> <i>Passed peacefully (2)</i> <i>Passed away unexpectedly (1)</i> <i>Passing (9)</i> <i>Saying goodbye (1)</i> <i>Goodbyes (2)</i>	66	54,5%
<b>DEATH IS A REST/SLEEP</b>	<i>Entered eternal rest (1)</i> <i>Fell to sleep (1)</i> <i>Fell asleep (1)</i> <i>Fell asleep peacefully (1)</i> <i>Peacefully asleep (1)</i> <i>Peacefully at rest (11)</i> <i>Rest safely (1)</i> <i>Rest in Peace (6)</i> <i>At rest (5)</i> <i>At peace (3)</i> <i>RIP (7)</i>	38	31,4%
<b>DEATH IS A REUNITING/JOINING</b>	<i>Reunited with her beloved (loving) parents (2)</i> <i>Reunited with his Mam, Dad, and Brother (1)</i> <i>Reunited with her son (1)</i> <i>Reunited with his beloved mother and father (1)</i> <i>Reunited with his devoted wife (1)</i> <i>Reunited with her loving Husband (2)</i> <i>Reunited all his loved ones (3)</i> <i>Until we meet again (1)</i>	12	9,8%
<b>DEATH IS A LOSS</b>	<i>Lose (1)</i> <i>Lost (2)</i>	3	2,4%
<b>DEATH IS A DEPARTURE OF A PERSON</b>	<i>Left us suddenly (1)</i> <i>Sadly left us (1)</i> <i>Leaving (1)</i>	3	2,4%
<b>DEATH IS A CHARACTER</b>	<i>Tragically takeIn (1)</i> <i>Sadly taken (1)</i>	2	1,6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	121	121	100%

## Overview of Russian Obituaries

In the Russian corpus, 125 euphemistic metaphors were identified. The most frequent mappings were **DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE** and **DEATH IS A FINAL LOCATION/END**, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency and percentage distribution of conceptual mappings in the Russian data

Conceptual metaphors	Frequency of euphemistic expressions	Total	%
<b>DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE</b>	<i>Ушёл(ла) из жизни (55)</i> <i>Ушла из земной жизни (1)</i> <i>Не стало (11)</i> <i>Покинул(ла) этот мир (1)</i>	68	54,4%
<b>DEATH IS A FINAL LOCATION/END</b>	<i>Скончался(лась) (38)</i> <i>Скоропостижно скончался(лась) (9)</i> <i>Окончил земной путь (1)</i>	48	38,4%
<b>DEATH IS A CHARACTER</b>	<i>Заболевание оборвало жизнь (2)</i> <i>Трагически оборвал жизнь (1)</i> <i>Коронавирус унёс жизнь (1)</i>	4	3,2%
<b>Other</b>	<i>Перестало биться сердце (4)</i> <i>Остановилось сердце (1)</i>	5	4%
<b>Total</b>	125	125	100%

Unlike English obituaries, Russian texts frequently conceptualize СМЕРТЬ as a final endpoint without specifying a destination, reflecting a more impersonal and finite framing of death.

**Discussion.** The conceptual mapping DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE was obviously the most common in both the English and Russian obituary samples. According to this conceptual mapping, the domain of *death* is comprehended through the domain *journey*. As a result, the metaphorical idioms conjure up a picture of becoming a traveler on a *journey beyond death*. The examples below show how these euphemistic metaphors were applied in context:

- A. Sally *departed peacefully* on 29<sup>th</sup> of Nov 2021, at the age of 60; (Eng78)
- B. In loving memory of Alan, who *passed away peacefully* on the 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021; (Eng96)
- C. 17 января 2021 года в 68 лет *ушёл из жизни* любимый муж и брат, заботливый отец и дедушка Сморгунов Сергей Алексеевич; (Rus17)
- D. Семья с прискорбием сообщает, что во вторник, 22 ноября 2021 года, в Киеве в возрасте 37 лет *ушла из земной жизни* старшая дочь и мама Екатерина Алексеевна Бочкова; (Rus16)

When death is described as a journey, the process of dying becomes less terrifying, and a comfortable image is evoked. This was also seen in *goodbye-expressions*. However, it was discovered in English samples only. Even though saying goodbye may be seen as the effects of DEATH for the family, here it is included to a sub-mapping of the source domain *journey* as the family is saying farewell to the deceased before the long trip to another world:

A. *Saying goodbye* to our Mum was the saddest day of our lives.

The periphrastic term *saying goodbye* is used by the family to notify DEATH in this example and it demonstrates how saying farewell is a euphemism used to notify a person's death. Rather from addressing a person's death directly, authors of obituaries chose to communicate it using sub-mapping term DEATH IS A FAREWELL (GOODBYE).

The conceptual mapping DEATH IS THE FINAL LOCATION/END was associated with a wide range of euphemistic expressions in the Russian corpus. There were 48 occurrences of the mapping in the Russian obituary, but none in the English corpus:

A. 4 ноября 2021 года, в четверг, скончался Гагин Анатолий Дмитриевич; (Rus22)

B. 1 октября 2021 года, в пятницу, на 94-м году жизни окончил земной путь участник Великой Отечественной войны, Белокопытов Николай Петрович; (Rus23)

It should be noted that in Russian euphemistic metaphors with *ending* do not have starting point as well as they do not indicate the specific particular final location.

DEATH IS SLEEP/REST is one of the most prevalent mappings in English corpora, whereas in Russian none excerpt can be found. The percentage distribution for this domain in English obituaries was 31,4%. In English culture it is a usual practice to announce a person's death by declaring that they have *fallen asleep* or *closed their eyes*. The following examples demonstrate how this metaphor was most commonly used:

A. *Peacefully at rest* on the 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021 whilst in the loving care of her family at the RSUH. (Eng81)

B. *Fell asleep peacefully* on Wed 15<sup>th</sup> Dec aged 80 years; (Eng82)

C. *At peace* on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at the RSUH, Elaine aged 84 years of Smallthorne; (Eng83)

D. *Entered eternal rest* on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021 while at Davlyn house nursing Home in the presence of her dearest family. (Eng84)

Moreover, English speakers use also the following terms such as *resting* and *RIP* to express DEATH through sleeping. *RIP* or *Rest in Peace* is derived from the Latin phrase "*requiescant in pace*", which means "*may they rest in peace*" [Merriam Webster Dictionary]:

A. *Rest in peace*, my dear brother; (Eng85)

B. He will be greatly missed and always remembered. *RIP* John from the all-Swift family; (Eng86).

The term "*goodnight*" was chosen as a death-related euphemistic metaphor because it implies that the person, who died, goes to bed and falls asleep, moreover, it essentially means 'I wish you a nice night'.

A. *Goodnight* and God bless you Steve. (Eng87)

The next big group of mapping in English is DEATH IS REUNITING/JOINING with 12 occurrences, but any could not have been found in Russian:

A. Peggy passed away on 14<sup>th</sup> December aged 95 after a long illness. Now *reunited* with loving husband Bill; (Eng120)

B. 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 *Re-united* with to her Husband Albert and Sister Pat; (Eng121).

The following minor sized mappings, two of which were found only in English, are DEATH IS A LOSS, DEATH IS A DEPARTURE OF A PERSON and DEATH IS A CHARACTER have been found in both corpora. The former two with the percentage of 2,4% and the latter one with 2,4% in English and 3,4 % in Russian. The first mapping suggests that when the person dies, we lose him or her, the second one is close to the mapping DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE, but with negative meaning that the deceased leaves us, when he or she dies, and there is no context of going to the trip:

A. It is much sadness we announce that Doreen *has lost* her beloved Barry, who passed away on 2<sup>nd</sup> December at Good Hope Hospital; (Eng98)

B. Suddenly and so sadly *left us* on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021, aged 89 years; (Eng109)

C. My Darling Tony, your *leaving me* has broken my heart; (Eng110).

The mapping DEATH IS A CHARACTER in English suggests that, when people die, they are *taken by mysterious creature*, whereas in Russian the character is known and it is mostly some *kind of illness*:

A. *Tragically taken* from his loving family on the 6/12/2021; (Eng77)

B. *Sadly taken* from the arms of the son; (Eng78)

C. Во вторник, 26 октября 2021 года, *тяжёлое онкологическое заболевание оборвало жизнь* молодой и талантливой 16-летней девушки Виолетты Правдиной; (Rus45)

D. Во вторник вечером 9 ноября 2021 года *оборвалась жизнь* шеф-инструктора Петра Пантелеевича Шатохина; (Rus46)

### Other mappings

In Russian corpora there has been found another minor mapping as DEATH IS REASON for example:

A. В пятницу, 24 сентября 2021 года, *остановилось сердце* украинского артиста балета Дмитрия Ивановича Омельченко; (Rus50)

B. 26 сентября 2021 года, в воскресенье, *перестало биться сердце* известного музыканта Анатолия Ивановича Крайника; (Rus5)

In these excerpts' DEATH/СМЕРТЬ is seen as the reason of the stopping of hearts of these people so it can be also example to the mapping DEATH IS REASON.

### Cross-Linguistic Comparison

The conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE is dominant in both corpora, suggesting a shared cognitive tendency to frame death as movement. However, significant differences emerge in the distribution of other mappings. English obituaries show a strong preference for SLEEP/REST and

**REUNITING/JOINING**, whereas Russian obituaries favour **FINAL LOCATION/END** metaphors.

According to Kövecses, metaphor is both universal and culture-specific, shaped by shared embodiment as well as cultural models [Kövecses, 4]. The findings support this claim by demonstrating both cross-linguistic similarities and culturally distinct patterns in the metaphorical conceptualization of death.

**Conclusion.** The present study has demonstrated that death is extensively euphemized in both English and Russian obituary discourse through a wide range of metaphorical conceptualizations. In both corpora, euphemistic metaphors significantly outnumber direct references to death, confirming that death remains a highly sensitive and socially regulated topic. This finding underscores the central role of metaphor as a cognitive and pragmatic tool for mitigating emotional impact and maintaining communicative decorum.

The analysis identified several dominant conceptual metaphors, most notably **DEATH IS A JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE**, which emerged as the most frequent mapping in both languages. This shared tendency suggests a broadly universal cognitive strategy for conceptualizing death as a transition rather than a sudden cessation. At the same time, notable cross-linguistic differences were observed. English obituaries showed a strong preference for metaphors such as **DEATH IS SLEEP/REST** and **DEATH IS REUNITING/JOINING**, whereas Russian obituaries more frequently employed metaphors framing death as a **FINAL LOCATION or END**. These differences reflect distinct cultural models of death and mourning embedded in each linguistic tradition.

The findings support the cognitive-linguistic claim that metaphor is both universal and culture-specific. While the reliance on metaphor to conceptualize death appears to be shared across languages, the choice of source domains and their frequency are shaped by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and genre conventions. Overall, the study highlights how euphemistic metaphor functions as a bridge between cognition, language, and culture in one of the most emotionally charged areas of human experience.

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