

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AS A TOOL OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract. *This article explores how conceptual metaphors construct meaning in contemporary discourse and how their systematicity can be supported by empirical findings across genres. The study aims to investigate recurring metaphorical patterns, clarify the mapping mechanisms supporting stable interpretation, and demonstrate how the choice of metaphors is connected to pragmatic purposes such as evaluation and persuasion. Methodologically, it combines qualitative metaphor identification with corpus-assisted analysis of collocational profiles and contextual constraints. The scientific novelty of the study lies in combining a mapping-based approach with distributional evidence to show how metaphorical models shape inference in authentic texts rather than being limited to introspective examples.*

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor, mapping, discourse, source domain, target domain, salience, inference, coherence.*

Annotatsiya. *Ushbu maqola konseptual metaforalarning zamonaviy nutqda ma'no qanday shakllantirishini va ularning tizimliliigi turli janrlardagi empirik dalillar bilan qay darajada asoslanishini o'rganadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi takrorlanuvchi metaforik qoliplarni aniqlash, barqaror talqinni ta'minlovchi xaritalash mexanizmlarini yoritish hamda metafora tanlovining baholash va ishonirish kabi pragmatik maqsadlar bilan bog'liqligini ko'rsatishdan iborat. Metodologik jihatdan tadqiqot sifatli metafora identifikatsiyasini kollokatsion profillar va kontekstual cheklovlarining korpusga asoslangan tahlili bilan uyg'unlashtiradi. Tadqiqotning ilmiy yangiligi xaritalashga asoslangan yondashuvni taqsimotli dalillar bilan birlashtirib, metaforik modellar introspektiv misollar bilan cheklanib qolmay, balki haqiqiy matnlarda xulosa chiqarish jarayonini qanday shakllantirishini ko'rsatishidir.*

Kalit so'zlar: *konseptual metafora, xaritalash, diskurs, manba soha, maqsad soha, muhimlik, xulosa chiqarish, izchillik.*

Аннотация. *Данная статья рассматривает, как концептуальные метафоры конструируют значение в современном дискурсе и как их системность может подтверждаться эмпирическими данными в различных жанрах. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении повторяющихся метафорических моделей, уточнении механизмов картирования, обеспечивающих устойчивую интерпретацию, а также в демонстрации того, как выбор метафор связан с прагматическими целями, такими как оценка и убеждение. В методологическом плане исследование сочетает качественную идентификацию метафор с корпусно-ориентированным анализом коллокационных профилей и контекстуальных ограничений. Научная новизна исследования состоит в объединении подхода, основанного на картировании, с дистрибутивными данными для демонстрации того, как метафорические модели формируют выводы в аутентичных текстах, а не ограничиваются лишь интроспективными примерами.*

Ключевые слова: *концептуальная метафора, картирование, дискурс, область-источник, область-цель, значимость, вывод, когерентность.*

Introduction. Conceptual metaphor theory has fundamentally changed the explanation of meaning in linguistics and cognitive science, which shifts attention from isolated lexical substitutions to systematic mappings organizing experience and language. Although the central idea that abstract reasoning is structured by metaphorical mapping has established rigorous descriptive accounts of conventional metaphors such as time as

motion or argument as war, the empirical question remains how, in actual discourse, conceptual metaphors function as tools for constructing meaning in context rather than as static inventories of correspondences. Early formulations highlighted embodied experience and cross-domain mapping, but later developments have emphasized discourse dynamics, interactional goals, and the role of genre in stabilizing or reshaping metaphorical models. The ongoing importance of this topic stems from the role of metaphor as a key link between cognition and communication. It enables speakers to condense complex relationships, steer inferential processes, and align viewpoints. At the same time, it can highlight particular evaluations while downplaying others, which in turn influences how meanings are ultimately interpreted.

Literature analysis. Current research increasingly demands methodological rigor, including explicit identification procedures and corpus evidence, to avoid overgeneralization from a small set of illustrative examples. International scholarship has argued for the explanatory value of conceptual metaphors in reasoning and categorization [1], and resultant work has refined the theory toward usage-based and discourse-sensitive analyses [2]. In Russian and post-Soviet traditions, metaphor has long been treated as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, with attention to semantic derivation and textual function [3]. Within Uzbek linguistics and stylistics, metaphor has been studied as a productive resource of meaning and expressiveness in literary and publicistic texts. However, it is still essential to connect such observations to cognitive mapping models and to demonstrate their interpretive consequences in systematically sampled discourse [4]. Against this background, the present study addresses the problem of how conceptual metaphors participate in meaning construction at the level of text and argument: not only what metaphors exist, but what they do to coherence, evaluation, and inference. The purpose of this article is to examine conceptual metaphor as a functional mechanism of meaning construction by identifying recurrent source domains, outlining the constraints on mapping processes, and analyzing the inferential pathways that these mappings enable within discourse. The objectives are threefold: first, to detect and classify metaphorically motivated expressions in a balanced set of contemporary English texts; second, to reconstruct the underlying conceptual mappings and examine their stability across contexts; third, to evaluate how metaphor choice correlates with pragmatic functions such as stance marking, persuasion, and narrative organization. The scientific novelty of the work consists in linking mapping reconstruction to corpus-assisted distributional patterns and contextual triggers, thereby demonstrating that meaning construction is constrained by both conceptual structure and local textual ecology. The practical significance lies in offering a framework that can inform discourse analysis, translation studies, and applied fields such as academic writing pedagogy, where metaphor influences how complex ideas are framed and understood.

Research methodology. The study is based on a corpus of 120 texts (approximately 180,000 words) drawn from three genres that differ in communicative purpose and audience design: academic popularization articles, editorial opinion pieces, and narrative long-form journalism. The selection criterion was thematic diversity combined with contemporaneity, with texts published between 2018 and 2024 to reduce diachronic noise. The corpus was compiled from publicly accessible sources and cleaned to remove captions and non-prose fragments. The methodological design integrates qualitative and quantitative steps. Firstly, metaphorically used lexical units were identified using a procedure aligned with established metaphor identification principles, operationalizing the distinction between contextual meaning and a more basic meaning and treating metaphor as present when contextual meaning is understood via comparison with the basic meaning [5]. Secondly, identified expressions were grouped into source domains through iterative coding, with domain assignments validated by inter-coder agreement on a 15 percent subsample. Thirdly, to relate conceptual mappings to usage patterns, a corpus-assisted step was conducted: concordance lines were examined to determine recurrent collocates, evaluative prosody, and syntactic frames associated with each target domain, allowing the analysis to move beyond isolated tokens to distributional regularities. This combined approach is scientifically justified because meaning construction is both conceptual and textual: mappings provide inferential structure, while repeated co-textual patterns reveal how speakers conventionally deploy that structure in situated communication.

Results and discussion. The analysis yielded 1,486 metaphorically motivated expressions across the corpus, with notable concentration in evaluative and argumentative passages. Across all genres, three target domains showed the highest metaphor density: social processes, knowledge and understanding, and emotional states. For social processes, the most frequent source domains were motion and trajectory, mechanisms and machinery, and conflict. Motion-based realizations included expressions that depict policy or collective change as movement along paths, acceleration, blockage, or turning points. Mechanism-based realizations framed institutions as systems with inputs, outputs, breakdowns, and repairs. Conflict-based realizations encoded disagreement through attack-defense scenarios, escalation, and strategic maneuvers. For knowledge and understanding, the dominant source domains were vision and illumination, construction and architecture, and possession and transfer. Vision metaphors marked degrees of epistemic access through clarity, focus, blindness, and perspective. Construction metaphors represented theories as frameworks, foundations, or scaffolds. Transfer metaphors depicted information as something delivered, shared, stored, or retrieved. For emotional states, the prevailing source domains were temperature and pressure, containment, and verticality. Temperature metaphors encoded intensity through heat and cooling. Pressure metaphors captured stress through load, weight, and breaking points.

Containment metaphors organized feelings as things inside a person that can be bottled up, released, or overflow. Verticality metaphors encoded valence through being up or down, rising or sinking. Genre differentiation appeared in distributional profiles rather than in the mere presence of metaphors. Editorial opinion pieces displayed the highest proportion of conflict and mechanism metaphors in relation to social processes, often clustering around evaluative lexis and modality. Academic popularization preferred construction and vision metaphors for knowledge, frequently co-occurring with definitional structures and hedging. Narrative journalism relied more on motion and containment metaphors, with extended metaphor chains that supported narrative coherence. The corpus-assisted examination showed that certain collocational frames strongly conditioned interpretation. For instance, motion metaphors around social processes frequently co-occurred with temporal adverbials and quantifiers, creating a sense of measurable progress. Mechanism metaphors co-occurred with failure predicates and repair verbs, producing diagnostic and prescriptive readings. Vision metaphors co-occurred with evidential markers and epistemic stance, systematically aligning metaphoricity with claims about reliability. These patterns were stable enough to suggest that metaphor selection is not random but functions as a regular device for organizing inferential expectations.

The results support the view that conceptual metaphors function as meaning-constructing tools by constraining what counts as a plausible inference in discourse. When a social process is framed as motion, the mapping imports entailments of directionality, obstacles, speed, and destination, thereby enabling readers to interpret complex institutional dynamics through a coherent scenario of travel. This does not only decorate the description, but it also selects a problem-space in which progress can be accelerated, blocked, or redirected, and it encourages evaluation through notions of being on track or off course. Similarly, mechanism metaphors for institutions make malfunction and repair salient, inviting a technocratic stance in which issues are treated as solvable through adjustment rather than through negotiation of values. Conflict metaphors intensify adversarial alignment, foregrounding agency, strategy, and winners and losers, which is consistent with observations that metaphor is deeply tied to framing and persuasion [6]. For knowledge and understanding, vision metaphors privilege evidence, transparency, and perspective, while construction metaphors privilege stability, coherence, and dependence among components. These mappings thus shape not only how knowledge is described but what counts as a strong explanation: a theory may be praised for solid foundations or criticized for shaky assumptions, and the mapping guides the reader toward evaluating intellectual work in terms of structural integrity. A critical implication is that metaphorical meaning construction is jointly determined by conceptual mapping and discourse context. The same source domain can lead to different evaluative outcomes depending on contextual cues, genre conventions, and pragmatic goals. In editorials, conflict metaphors

were frequently embedded in modality and moral evaluation, amplifying polarization. In popularization texts, construction metaphors were moderated by hedges and definitions, thereby supporting didactic clarity rather than polemic. This aligns with discourse-oriented developments in metaphor studies that emphasize usage, negotiation, and local coherence [2]. The distributional findings add an empirical layer: collocational profiles and recurrent syntactic frames reveal how metaphor becomes routinized as a meaning-making practice, stabilizing particular inferential pathways. At the same time, the data show limits to mapping-based predictability. Extended metaphor chains in narrative journalism sometimes introduced mixed mappings that could shift the interpretive frame mid-paragraph, suggesting that meaning construction can be strategically dynamic rather than strictly governed by a single conceptual model. The study has several limitations. The corpus focuses on contemporary English and three genres, which constrains generalizability across languages and discourse traditions. Although inter-coder validation was used, source-domain assignment can still involve analytic judgment, especially in borderline cases where multiple mappings are plausible. Additionally, the corpus-assisted step captures distributional tendencies but cannot, by itself, guarantee cognitive reality; it provides evidence of textual regularity rather than direct evidence of mental representation. Future research could address these limitations by expanding to multilingual corpora, including Uzbek and Russian materials to test cross-linguistic stability of mapping preferences, and by integrating experimental methods such as reading-time measures to assess whether certain metaphor frames systematically guide inference during comprehension. Another promising direction is to model metaphor chains computationally to determine how local coherence is maintained when mappings shift, thereby linking conceptual analysis to formal representations.

Conclusion. This study shows that conceptual metaphors operate as systematic tools of meaning construction by providing structured mappings that guide inference, salience, and evaluation in discourse. Across genres, recurrent metaphorical models organize key abstract domains such as social processes, knowledge, and emotion, and their distributional profiles reveal stable co-textual frames that condition interpretation. The findings show that metaphor choice is closely connected to communicative goals, because it can diagnose, persuade, explain, or narratively structure experience by importing scenario-based entailments from familiar domains. At the same time, meaning construction remains context-sensitive, with genre conventions and local textual cues modulating the evaluative and argumentative consequences of a given mapping. Overall, the article contributes an empirically grounded account of how conceptual metaphor operates not only as a cognitive principle but as a discourse practice that shapes coherence and understanding. Future work may extend the approach through multilingual

comparison and comprehension-focused experimentation to further clarify how metaphor frames influence interpretive outcomes.

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