

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE PERSON IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE THROUGH LEXICAL UNITS AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE ELEMENTS

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Abstract

Both grammatical structures and lexical elements, including figurative language, play a significant role in the conceptualization of individuals across various genres of media discourse. The rationale for examining lexical units alongside metaphors in this chapter stems from the close interaction between these two essential linguistic tools in shaping the representation of individuals in media texts. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to identify the linguistic metaphors commonly employed in English-language news texts, to elucidate their function in the conceptualization of individuals, and to analyze the influence of metaphorical language on participants engaged in this genre of discourse.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the function of metaphors particularly conceptual metaphors in the process of conceptualization, it is instructive to draw upon the foundational work of (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as well as the more recent extension of this theory by (Kovecses Zoltan 2020) in his *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (Cambridge University Press).

In contemporary linguistic research, metaphors are broadly categorized into conceptual and linguistic types. The seminal work “*Metaphors We Live By*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) laid the groundwork for this distinction and significantly contributed to the development of cognitive linguistics. Conceptual metaphors are understood to pertain not to language itself, but to patterns of thought, whereas linguistic metaphors are the means by which these conceptual structures are expressed verbally.

Hungarian linguist Zoltán Kövecses, a prominent figure in cognitive linguistics, further elaborates on this distinction in his 2020 work *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, asserting that “conceptual metaphors can be expressed in language through linguistic metaphors” (Kovecses, 2020, pp. 2–3).

So, these theoretical frameworks provide a crucial lens through which to understand the formation of concepts and conceptual metaphors, a process that unfolds within discourse itself.

In her book *Metaphor in Discourse*, Y. Semino defines metaphor as “...an event in which something is spoken of and potentially thought of in terms of something else,” and approaches it through the lens of discourse analysis (Semino, Elena. 2008. *Metaphor in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1). She explores the use of metaphor across various discourse types and genres, including artistic, political, scientific, and educational contexts. A substantial body of scholarly work has also been produced in this domain (e.g., Kennedy, Victor. 2000. “Metaphor in the News Introduction.” *Metaphor and Symbol* 15(4): 209–211, London: Routledge; Cameron, Lynne. 2003. *Metaphor in Educational Discourse*. London: Continuum; Musolff, Andreas and Jörg Zinken, eds. 2009. *Metaphor and Discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan; Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna. 2014. “Coercive Metaphors in News Headlines.” *Brno Studies in English* 40(1): 149–173, etc.).

In the aforementioned studies, scholars—particularly those adopting a linguistic perspective—investigate metaphors (i.e., conceptual metaphors) and linguistic metaphors across a range of discourse types and genres. To conduct such analyses more effectively and systematically, it is essential to develop clear criteria and methodological principles for identifying linguistic metaphors within discourse.

It is within this framework that the *Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification* (MLMI) was introduced by a research group known as the Pragglejaz Group (Steen, Gerard, Aletta Dorst, Berenike Herrmann, Anna Kaal, Tina Krennmayr, and Tryntje Pasma. 2010. *Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 238 p.). The authors highlight the importance of closely analyzing lexical units—i.e., words and phrases—in order to identify linguistic metaphors. The first step in this method involves determining the direct or primary meaning of the lexical unit. The researchers explain: “The direct meaning is usually used in different contexts and is specific. If the lexical unit has a more basic meaning in other contexts than in a specific context, it is determined that the contextual meaning differs from the main meaning, but can be understood in comparison with it” (pp. 5–6).

It is noteworthy that the authors primarily apply their method to news discourse, which they argue is “...naturally particularly rich in metaphor” (p. 43). However, in our view, it is not only news discourse but media discourse more broadly that offers a fertile ground for metaphor analysis. Accordingly, in the following subsection, we will apply this method to examine how lexical units and linguistic metaphors jointly contribute to the conceptualization of the individual across various genres within media discourse.

Various lexical units, including words denoting a person, names of a person, profession, position, rank, scientific degree, nicknames, often act as dominant components of metaphors based on transfer (metaphor) and association (metonymy). For example, in the famous metaphor such as “Iron lady”, the dominant component is the word “lady” denoting a person and gender, and it is on the basis of the initial, that is, basic meaning of this word that the metaphor “Iron lady” is formed, referring to strong women. N. Dobric notes that metaphor forms the basis of the conceptualization of a person and is directly involved in the formation of

human names (Dobric Nicola 2010 Theory of Names and Cognitive Linguistics: The Case of the Metaphor. *Filozofija i Društvo* Vol. 21. Issue 1, 135-147). In this sense, the participation of linguistic metaphors in the conceptualization of a person in various types of discourse, including media discourse, is particularly interesting. This type of discourse can provide us with extensive and rich material for analyzing figurative language. In this regard, we will consider the role of linguistic metaphors in the conceptualization of the person in news discourse using the method presented by J. Steen and colleagues.

According to the egocentric model discussed in the previous chapter, the conceptualization of the person in discourse occurs in time and space. According to A. Mammadov and M. Mammadov, "Time, space, and person have traditionally played the role of categorical frameworks for meanings" (Mammadov Azad and Misgar Mammadov 2019 Contextualizing and conceptualizing time, space, and person in political discourse. *International Review of Pragmatics*. 11, 137-152, p. 138). They further note that "This is expressed in language because the person conceptualizes time, space, and self by expanding meaning to understanding through words and metaphorically used expressions". According to the method we use, the first step is to determine the contextual meanings of the words and expressions being analyzed. Then, "the next step is to discover the existence of a meaning that is more direct or fundamental than the contextual meaning" (17, p. 45).

The use of linguistic metaphors in the process of conceptualizing the person makes news discourse, especially headlines, not only laconic and effective, but also extremely interesting for the audience. In this respect, the use of linguistic metaphors based on similarity and comparison is very symptomatic. Consider the following news headlines broadcast on BBC television:

BBC News
OCTOBER 12, 2024

Fifth peacekeeper wounded in southern Lebanon, UN says

A UN peacekeeper has been wounded in southern Lebanon after being hit by gunfire, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) has said, the fifth member of the multinational force to be injured in recent days.

In a statement on Saturday, Unifil said the peacekeeper was injured at its headquarters in the southern city of Naqura on Friday night amid "ongoing military activity nearby", though added that it did not know the origin of the fire.

"He underwent surgery at our Nagoura hospital to remove the bullet and is currently stable," it said.

And:
BBC News
OCTOBER 13, 2024

A luxury hotel, a mini bar and a relentless feud between 'soccer wives'

It's a saga worthy of a soap opera, as Coleen Rooney and Rebekah Vardy's dispute returned to court.

What attracts attention in these headlines is the compound word peacekeeper formed from the words peace and keeper and the expression 'soccer wives' formed from the words soccer and wives. In the first

example, the word peace, which has no direct connection with a person, is used metaphorically by combining it with the person-conceptualizing keeper in the compound word frame thanks to the suffix *er*. Although this linguistic metaphor that conceptualizes a person is also created as a result of transfer, the person who is the source of the transfer in this headline is not explicit, but implicit. The personal pronoun *He* used in the news text following the headline acts as a metaphorical source of transfer. In the second example, the word soccer, which has no direct connection with a person, is used metaphorically by combining it with the person-conceptualizing word wives in the frame of a phrase. Unlike the first example, here the persons who are the sources of the transfer are explicitly conceptualized through personal names in the next sentence within the same headline frame. In both cases, this word and expression acquire a new contextual meaning. The following advertising text prepared by Turkish Airlines, which was broadcast on CNN, is also interesting in this respect:

CNN
Turkish Airlines
Dining Onboard

Discover the world's finest flavors with Turkish Airlines. We offer our passengers an unequaled flight experience, combining Turkish hospitality with the most exquisite tastes of the world and Turkish cuisine prepared by our Flying Chefs. Our award-winning dishes, courtesy of Turkish DO & CO, will satisfy the most discerning of palates.

The metaphorical expression Flying Chefs, which is very interesting in terms of the metaphorical conceptualization of the person, attracts attention in this advertising text. The metaphoricalization of this expression based on comparison was possible due to the fact that one of the two lexical units that formed it, Chefs, acquired a new contextual meaning (chefs flying on the plane and chefs on the ground). As a result, a very effective metaphorical expression plays a central role in this advertising discourse in terms of its impact on the audience.

Personal names and nicknames also play an important role in the conceptualization of the person in the discourse. In this regard, N. Guluzadeh notes that "The characteristic feature of these lexical elements is that many of them arise as a result of metaphor. Metaphorical names in the text, events and information from different eras and texts provide certain information and data about people. The reason for this results in a great variety of metaphorical names. They include names of historical figures, mythological characters, literary characters, etc.." (Guluzadeh Nisa NAMES AS A REPRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation Abstract, Baku 2021, 28 pp., p. 18). Let us consider the following article published in The Guardian newspaper dedicated to Mary (Mother Mary), who is considered a saint in the Christian world:

The Guardian
24 December 2024
Zeyneb Sayilgan

I grew up Muslim in a Catholic community – and Mary represented common ground

I had just finished teaching a class on “the Muslim Mary”. Many non-Muslims who attended were puzzled to find out that Muslims had a connection with Mary at all, and had no knowledge of how important she is to our belief and practice. This came as no surprise. Half of Americans report they know “not much” or “nothing at all” about Islam.

As a Muslim girl growing up in the overwhelmingly Catholic state of Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany, Mary was a constant presence in my life. Her images and statues, dotted across my city, smiled at me as I walked to school. At Christmas time, I joined with my classmates to sing songs such as *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*.

At home and in the mosque, I was fascinated to learn about Mary’s exceptional character, courage and devotion. She is one of the most honoured women in Islam and the Qur’an dedicates the entire chapter 19 to show her high status. She is special, not only because she was the mother of Jesus but because of her exemplary spirituality, worship and service to God.

For me and many Muslims, she remains a role model of how to cultivate moral character, trust and hope in God in times of despair. She demonstrates that in uncertainty, there is also possibility. Mary was faced with so many struggles, yet she persisted. As a young woman who experienced many obstacles because of my Muslim headscarf, Mary encouraged me not to surrender to prejudice and stereotypes. Like her, I pressed forward in finding my place in the world.

As I grew older, I continued to listen to Muslim Christmas songs with my daughters, one of whom I named Maryam – Mary’s Arabic name in the Qur’an. In naming my daughter after Mary, I prayed that she too would embody her piety and those beautiful virtues of compassion, humility, courage and hope.

Mary’s presence is visible in many parts of the Muslim world. The mihrab – the wall structure in every mosque that points in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, the shared focal point for Muslims in prayer – is also the name of Mary’s private sanctuary room as mentioned in the Qur’an.

Often I would take my students to Mother Mary’s House (Meryem Ana Evi), a pilgrimage site in Turkey where Muslims and Christians honour this holy figure. We would of course also visit the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and look up at Mary, who watches over all the worshippers who enter the mosque for prayer. Out of respect to Islamic monotheism, which does not allow any images or statues, Mary’s beautiful painting is typically covered during prayer times.

Mosques in the United States take pride in naming themselves after Mary and Jesus. The Maryum Islamic Center in Maryland, the Maryam Islamic Center in Texas and the Jesus, Son of Mary mosque in New York – all point to the sacred connections between Islam and Christianity.

While getting to know more about the Christian Mary throughout my life, I have not compromised my own Muslim beliefs or glossed over those important theological differences. For Christians, Mary

remains the mother of God (Theotokos) and occupies a high position in the idea of “God made flesh”. Muslims, however, see her as the mother of the Prophet Jesus, who is fully human and not God incarnate. Her significance comes from her own traits, such as her purity and devotion. I learned to live with healthy disagreement and affirmed those unresolvable tensions.

Similarly, in exploring the Muslim portrayal of Mary, I hope that my students left my class with a richer and greater appreciation of her spiritual legacy. We all agreed about her expansive compassion and her embodiment of hope.

Christians and Muslims together make up more than half of the world’s population. I hope that we can honour Mary together in working for more mutual understanding and the betterment of our human family.

The author of the article draws attention to the respect for Mother Mary in the Islamic world. In that context, a number of expressions based on the initial or direct meaning of this person’s name are used (The Muslim Mary, Maryam- Mary’s Arabic name, Mary’s exceptional character, Mary was faced with so many struggles, Mary’s private sanctuary room, as mentioned in the Qur’an, Muslim portrayal of Mary, In naming my daughter after Mary). The article also contains metaphors formed by this person’s name together with other lexical units based on similarity or comparison: Mary was a constant presence in my life, she remains a role model, Mary’s presence is visible in many parts of the Muslim world. These metaphorical expressions arise from the contextual meanings of the corresponding lexical units.

Thus, linguistic metaphors or metaphorically used words and expressions directly participate in the conceptualization of a person in media discourse. As a result of their use, media texts are sometimes short and laconic, and sometimes stylistically diverse. The main point is that these metaphorical expressions are one of the most effective means of influencing the audience in media discourse. Linguistic metaphors participate in the process of conceptualizing a person in media discourse in harmony with lexical-grammatical means. They make this conceptualization more efficient from both pragmatic and cognitive points of view. As a result, it is revealed how various language means (lexical and grammatical units) create meaning and significance. Thus, linguistic metaphors participating in the conceptualization of a person in media discourse perform a very important function both from a pragmatic (as a means of laconicism, persuasion and influence) and cognitive (role in conceptualization) point of view.

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