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# Inheritance of Features in Metaphoric Mappings in English

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# Introduction

This book aims to provide a refined theoretical framework for describing abstract concepts as they are linguistically represented in English. The theoretical background of the dissertation draws on numerous examples from other languages, notably Polish, Russian and Czech; however, the vast majority of examples examined throughout the dissertation come from English. Nonetheless, it is believed that most, if not all of the theoretical implications of the findings presented here will affect a description of abstract concepts in any natural language, since conceptual metaphor, which provides the point of departure for the present dissertation, unquestionably occurs across linguistic boundaries. The boldness of this claim of universality is extenuated somewhat by the fact that at the ultimate theoretical foundation of this dissertation lies the general property of knowledge, referred to as embodiment. Consequently, language is also believed to be embodied (cf. section 1.5.1).

The overall theoretical framework of the dissertation is second-generation cognitive linguistics. Since there are at present several current and distinct approaches to cognitive linguistics, (cf. e.g. Fauconnier (1994, 1996); Jackendoff (1985); Wierzbicka (1989, 1995)), it should be clarified that the cognitive framework adopted herein relies on the theory of Lakoff and his collaborators (cf. e.g. Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1997 Lakoff and Turner 1989), as well as that of Langacker (1987, 1991, 2000). Within the framework of cognitive linguistics thus delineated, special emphasis will be placed on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

The entire work has been developed in three chapters. Chapter One discusses the main theoretical foundations of the dissertation. Section 1.1 provides a presentation of the initial accounts of metaphor by Aristotle and Quintilian who pioneered the work on metaphor in language. The section contains a brief analysis of the main differences and overlaps between Aristotle and Quintilian's approach and CMT. Section 1.2 discusses in detail the theory of Lakoff and Johnson, which is the crucial departure point for the theoretical investigations undertaken here. Within this framework, particular attention has been paid to image schemata, whose power of structuring pre-conceptual processes is seen here as crucial for the formation of abstract concepts. Section 1.3 presents an issue within CMT that is of particular importance for the present project, namely divisions of metaphors which, broadly speaking, capture a preexisting similarity between two entities, in contrast to those which create a previously unseen similarity.

Section 1.4 presents a further development of metaphor theory – Blending Theory, and discusses its usefulness in refining the description of abstract concepts. Section 1.5 presents the capacity of metaphoric language to produce new or refined understandings of already familiar concepts. Section 1.6 concerns itself with the constraints on metaphoric transfer. It discusses three broad constraints on

metaphoric mappings, which impose restrictions on metaphorization, namely Embodiment, Invariance and Inheritance. This section follows a progression of ever more specific limitations on metaphoric transfer, and indicates the necessity of refining the existing theories, most notably by acknowledging the full role of inheritance in the formation of schematic structure in abstract concepts. Section 1.7 concerns itself with the general issue of defining concepts, and points at various problems that the approach presented in this dissertation may alleviate, especially problems related to circularity and vagueness of definitions. Finally, Szwedek's Objectification Theory is discussed in section 1.8 as a major theoretical contribution to the argument developed here. The concluding part of the chapter focuses on the value of CMT as a descriptive framework for abstract concepts and points out necessary improvements of the current theory, needed to accommodate the description of abstract concepts.

Chapter Two deals with the description of nouns in traditional approaches within linguistics, as contrasted with the approach advocated by proponents of Cognitive Grammar. Section 2.1 briefly discusses the etymology of the word *noun*, and the related original usage. Section 2.2 covers traditional theoretical approaches to nouns, and is divided into four respective sub-sections covering selected representatives of each approach. Section 2.3 presents the definition of nouns and nominalization developed within Cognitive Linguistics. Two issues, bounding and reification[1], lie at the heart of this definition, and thus they are discussed in the separate subsections of 2.3. A matter crucial for developing the present thesis is the place of abstract nouns in the cognitive definition, and how well this definition accounts for their existence. This issue is discussed in section 2.3.3. Section 2.4 covers highly abstract nouns which constitute a remaining problem area under the current theory.

In discussing the schematic structure of abstract concepts it is useful to refer to the role of cases in inflectional languages, especially within the descriptive framework proposed by Janda (2002). The reason why this is useful is that Janda proposes to view case systems as coherent linguistic devices for encoding all possible relations obtaining between concrete and abstract entities. Even though her work concentrates on Slavic languages, and the primary scope of this dissertation is English, useful parallels between both descriptions emerge. The discussion of Janda's findings and their relevance to the present work are discussed in section 2.5. Section 2.6 presents the role of inheritance and objectification in supplementing the accepted cognitive definition of nouns, to better account for the conceptual structure of highly abstract nouns. The chapter is concluded with section 2.7, containing final remarks linking the theories presented in Chapter Two with the findings included in Chapter Three.

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1   For the sake of consistency, in this dissertation *reification* refers to the cognitive process described in section 2.3, while the term *nominalization* is used to mean the grammatical process of encoding a conceptual entity as a noun or noun phrase.

At this point, it should be explained why an entire chapter of the dissertation is devoted to nouns. The theoretical conclusion drawn from linguistic data analyzed in Chapter Three, and supported by Objectification Theory is the following: nouns, which prototypically signify things, are experientially primary over temporal and atemporal relations[2], signified by such word classes as verbs and adjectives or prepositions respectively. Importantly, this statement is not about language *per se*; it is about the experience of the world as represented in language. By merely examining linguistic data one might never draw such a conclusion. It was a combination of linguistic data and findings in neurology that formed the basis of such theoretical devices as image schemas, or Objectification. Indeed, the subject of nouns and nominalizations is of central importance to the present dissertation, because nouns are seen as the primary linguistic device for naming abstract entities and manipulating them in the mind. They are primary in the sense of human experience of the world, as filled with things which the mind categorizes and upon which it imposes relations.

Chapter Three is devoted to the analysis of linguistic examples. The sub-division of the chapter is motivated theoretically by the division of target domains according to their degree of abstraction. This division of target domains is seen here as non-trivial; indeed, it is essential for the development of the thesis and the conclusions reached. Consequently, differences between metaphoric transfer into concrete domains are analyzed (sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2) and contrasted with metaphoric transfer into lower- and higher-order abstract domains. The lower-order abstract domains are exemplified by such concepts as GADGET and TOOL which are thoroughly analyzed as target domains in metaphors (section 3.3). These lower-order abstract concepts are subsequently compared with such higher-order abstract domains as EMOTION, ADVERTISING, and particularly LUCK which is the most abstract of the three. The discussion of LUCK and ADVERTISING provides an opportunity to present further limitations of metaphoric transfer: valuation (section 3.5.1) and function (section 3.6.1) The chapter is concluded with a section of remarks (3.7) related to the role of Objectification Theory in explaining the peculiar properties of abstract concepts discussed in the previous sections.

Chapter Three is followed by the conclusions of the dissertation. As the main aim of the present work is to provide a refined theoretical framework for describing abstract concepts as they are represented in English, the concluding chapter covers limitations of metaphoric transfer from one domain to another, and mechanisms of selecting a given schematic structure to inform an abstract concept. Specifically, I emphasize the role of function, valuation and entrenchment in the process of selecting source-domain content.

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2   Cf. Langacker's crucial distinction of linguistic signs into ones encoding things and relations (Langacker 1987).

## Thesis statement

Since abstract concepts are constructed and understood through metaphors, metaphorization lies at the very foundation of understanding and using abstraction. The vast majority of what we can and do say about abstract concepts is metaphoric. Moreover, in abstract concepts, metaphorization creates a similarity, rather than revealing a preexisting latent similarity (secion 1.3, 1.5). This process of similarity-creation needs to be accounted for in order to understand the origins of mental and linguistic abstraction, which, after all, characterizes humans as a species. The ability of metaphor to create similarities where none existed before has been elusive and has defied explanation. And yet, without explaining it, the theory of metaphor is far from complete, as it accounts for only a certain percentage of all metaphorical expressions. This book aims to introduce the notion of Inheritance of image--schematic structure, which is a powerful theoretical tool for explaining the origin of image-schematic structure present in abstract concepts. More specifically, when Inheritance of structure is used as an organizing principle in structural transfer from the source to the target, the hierarchy of constraints on metaphorization can be refined to a far greater degree than used to be possible. This hierarchy may be summarized as follows:

–   Embodiment (as the broadest and most basic constraint, very useful for providing a theoretical anchor to the entire theory, but one that constrains very little);
–   Invariance (more refined, but suffering from problems with vagueness and putting too high a premium on similarity between structures; ill-suited for explaining highly abstract concepts);
–   Inheritance (based on Objectification; much better suited for explaining those metaphors which are left unexplained under the Invariance Hypothesis. Invariance requires further refinement in the form of large-scale corpus-based investigations into mapping routines applied in language – something that is beyond the immediate scope of this dissertation);
–   Function and valuation (additional factors playing a role in mappings. Function is related to broadly understood linguistic pragmatics. Valuation needs to be included because of its ubiquity – by looking at corpus data, we see that a large amount of expressions featuring abstract concepts are valuating expressions).

Thus, the present book aims to enhance the existing theories by including inheritance in the description of metaphors and by close examination of metaphors featuring abstract target domains. Moreover, I will show abstract target domains to be different from concrete ones in that they are a result of interplay between mapping of structure and inheritance of structure. The model of description of abstract concepts developed in the present dissertation is based on the finding

that the more abstract the target domain is, the less of its structure comes from metaphoric mapping, and the more from inheritance. Without a doubt this is the most important conclusion derived from the analysis presented below, as it enables a significant improvement of the existing theory of conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics.