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Conceptual Metaphors and Metonymies in “Coraline” by N. Gaiman

Abstract

This research embraces conceptual metaphors and metonymies in Neil Gaiman’s book “Coraline”. The theoretical framework of the article is based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor by Lakoff (1993). The article employs the qualitative method of analysis: the metaphoric and metonymic linguistic expressions from the book have been selected and grouped according to their corresponding cognitive metaphors and conceptual metonymies. Thus, the research aims to identify and analyze these linguistic expressions and their conceptual metaphors and metonymies, identify their significance and relation to the plot, and the function of universal and cultural-specific metaphors.

Keywords: Coraline, conceptual metaphor theory, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metonymy.

1. Introduction

Children’s literature is one of the developing fields in the 21st century. Numerous works have affected and defined its future development. This research, focused on Neil Gaiman’s book “Coraline”, aims to:

1. Define and analyze conceptual metaphors and metonymies in the above-mentioned work;
2. Analyze their significance and relation to the plot;
3. Identify the function of universal and cultural-specific metaphors;

The theoretical framework is based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), also, Contemporary Theory of Metaphor (Lakoff, 1993). The relevance of the research can be reinforced by the immense significance and popularity of cognitive metaphor theory in linguistics. The book “Coraline”, on the other hand, has a special place in children’s literature and has won prestigious awards, including Hugo for Best Novella, Bram Stoker Award for Best Work for Young Readers, etc. (Coraline, n.d.)

Structurally, the article is divided into several sections: parts 2 and 3 discuss the theoretical framework of the research. Part 4 focuses on the methodology, while parts 5 and 6 demonstrate the analysis of the data and important findings. The last part of the study concludes the main points of the research.

2. Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy: the Main Characteristics

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the emergence of which is connected to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work "Metaphors we live by" (1980), has made a profound influence on the further development of different branches of linguistics, but most importantly, on that of cognitive linguistics. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details" (1980: 3). The main principles of conceptual metaphor theory are justified and argued based on our everyday experience, the way humans perceive and interpret the world around us. This, again, proves that metaphors are not only linguistic phenomena and cannot be associated with only one medium of communication, specifically, the written channel. On the contrary, metaphors motivate the way we think and express ourselves daily. They operate in different modes, including visual, spoken verbal, gestural, etc. (Forceville, 2016)

The primary principles of CMT are based on mapping, sets of correspondences between the source and target domains (Lakoff, 1993). The conceptual domain, traditionally thought to be more abstract, is referred to as the target, and the source domain functions as the source of metaphorical expressions, the features of which are transmitted to the target. For instance, the source domain of WAR can be employed to define the target domain of POLITICS (POLITICS IS WAR) (Ling, 2010). However, as Lakoff (1993) maintains, conceptual mappings should not be confused with their names. "Names of mappings commonly have a propositional form, for example, LOVE IS A JOURNEY. But the mappings themselves are not propositions... Metaphors are mappings, that is, sets of conceptual correspondences" (Lakoff, 1993:207).

Depending on the definition of the source and target domains, we can conclude that metaphors assist in defining not only abstract concepts but, also, social and health-related problems, including illnesses, crime, economics, etc. (Thibodeau et al, 2017). To illustrate, Alarcon et al (2019), present the conceptual metaphors employed by the teachers, one of them being THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS IS A JOURNEY. According to the research, in this metaphor, students are viewed as travellers, while teachers as guides who assist them in taking the long and complicated route leading to a particular destination that is the expected results and achievements of the learning process. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education is seen as the entity that defines the map – the lesson plan. Thus, the same source domain can be employed to conceptualize different target domains, in this case, the process of teaching and learning as well as love.

Kövecses (2017) states that to analyze our everyday experience, it is easier to address unidirectional conceptual mapping: from concrete to abstract. Furthermore, the majority of conceptual metaphors employ this type of mapping. However, the metaphors such as "The surgeon is a butcher" proves that a systematic set of correspondences can occur in the case of concrete source and target domains as well, which, on the

other hand, can affect the value of metaphoric linguistic expressions in addition with the changes in the mapping (Araya Sanhueza et al, 2015; Kövecses, 2010a). A prominent example can be bidirectional metaphors from Jane Austin's "Persuasion" - A PERSON IS A ROOM, and A ROOM IS A PERSON (Zohrabi & Layegh, 2020). The first conceptual metaphor describes one of the characters that can be furnished similarly to a room, while the second relates to fate and sins ("fallen in their destination, fallen rooms"). These examples provide a solid foundation to determine the significance of metaphoric mappings and their directionality. The process of encoding a metaphor also leads to transferring at least one important feature from source to target, among which Forceville (2016) singles out connotation, value, attitude, and emotion. Furthermore, he introduces the formula, A-ing is B-ing instead of the regular propositional structure, to form new metaphors.

Similarly to metaphors, metonymies are also cognitive. However, they allow us "to use one entity to stand for another" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 36). Metonymic aspects are also grounded in our everyday experience and occur in daily conversations. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) present different types of conceptual metonymies, which include PART FOR WHOLE, PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT, OBJECT FOR USER, etc. However, despite its significance, there is no precise definition of the term domain and the exact difference between metaphor and metonymy.

We can conclude that based on the cognitive nature of metaphors, their existence is apparent in every sphere of human activity. The same can be said about conceptual metonymies. Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory is mainly based on conventional, primary metaphors, the great majority of which already exist in different nations and are fixed in cognitive systems.

3. Metaphor as a Means of Transferring Cultural Knowledge

Culture is an irreplaceable part of human activity and civilization. As Sigua (2013) states, it can be regarded as the result of the human power of reasoning. Even though culture determines the existence of different ethnicities, from today's perspective, it is complicated to provide a precise definition of the concept in question. According to Kodua (2001), the complicatedness associated with the correct interpretation of culture is deeply rooted in various factors such as the time-spatial divergence of a scholar and culture, remoteness, etc. Irrespective of these reasons, culture maintains its position as one of the means of perceiving and interpreting outside knowledge and information. Furthermore, Topchishvili (2009a, 2009b) highlights its significance in determining and developing ethnic identities, the absence of which directly results in the extinction of nations. Based on this, one can deduce the importance of cultural knowledge.

As for the interrelation of culture and cognitive metaphor theory, the main terms, universality and variation, primary and complex metaphors, can be mentioned. In this respect, of particular importance are the

works by Kövecses (1990, 2010b), who examines the above-mentioned features concerning emotion-related linguistic expressions in different languages, and not only. He connects the issue of universality with primary metaphors that we find within various cultures due to common physical experiences. For instance, orientational conceptual metaphors HAPPY IS UP, SADNESS IS DOWN that can be found in Georgian and English (Rusieshvili-Cartledge & Dolidze, 2015) are clear representatives of primary metaphors.

Interestingly, Kövecses (2017) highlights the cultural significance of forming novel metaphors. Similar conceptual metaphors and their corresponding linguistic expressions reflect worldviews, beliefs, ideologies, etc, that exist in a particular society; for instance, metaphors LIFE IS A SEA VOYAGE (Nhan, 2019) and LIVER AS THE LOCUS OF EMOTIONS (Kieau, 2017). The first metaphor can be culturally-specific because it's associated with a lifestyle, while the second conceptual metaphor, unlike others, employs the liver (not the heart) as the locus of emotions.

For the identification of cultural metaphors, we should take into consideration the factors, such as environment, history, social setting, etc. Cultural context can be viewed as one of the sources for formulating novel metaphors.

4. Theoretical framework and methodology

As was mentioned in the introductory section, the theoretical framework of this article is based on Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory. For the database of linguistic expressions, the book "Coraline" was chosen. The research employs the qualitative method of analysis. The linguistic expressions were selected and categorized in terms of their significance to the study and to the plot.

5. Conceptual Metaphors in "Coraline"

5.1. EYES ARE THE CONTAINER OF THE SOUL

(1) "**His eyes were buttons** – big and black and shiny." (Gaiman, 2003: 28)

The above-mentioned conceptual metaphor is quite crucial in determining the overall message of the book. The parallel universe, which was discovered by Coraline through a secret passageway, represents not only the reflection of the house but also the people who have tight connections with the character. The main distinguishing feature between the real and "other" people is their eyes. Interestingly, Gaiman decided to choose black button eyes as the marker of their 'soullessness'. The other mother, who is the creator of the parallel universe and who functions as the main antagonist, deliberately tries to impose her power on Coraline by luring her into sewing black buttons instead of her real eyes. Thus, the eyes become a locus of

the soul. A creature without a soul can be regarded as a ‘thing’ – A PERSON WITHOUT A SOUL IS A THING. Coraline employs this particular word in relation to her ‘other’ parents.

5.2. *EYES ARE THE CONTAINERS OF EMOTIONS*

In order to construct complex symbols, humans tend to employ schemas. New linguistic expressions are formulated not by grammar but by a speaker in the process of one’s purposeful activities (Gamkrelidze, 2008:470). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) state that the preposition ”in” is employed to represent the container schema, this idea is also maintained by Fangfang (2009) who highlights the difference between landmark and trajectory in the conceptualization of eyes as containers. Below, we have provided the realizations of the conceptual metaphor EYES ARE CONTAINERS OF EMOTIONS:

(2) “Miss Spink and Forcible stared at **her blankly**” (Gaiman, 2003: 20)

(3) “There was something **hungry in the old man’s button eyes** that made Coraline feel uncomfortable.” (Gaiman, 2003: 32)

In example 3, the landmark is represented by black button eyes, however, as opposed to the previous chapter, in which the absence of the soul was directly connected to their existence, here the realization of container schema is mainly attributed to linguistic expressions related to negative emotions, which again can pinpoint the true nature of the characters. Example 2 reinforces the container schema: the absence of emotions is connected to the emptiness of the container.

5.3. *KNOWING IS SEEING*

Herrero Ruiz (2005) discusses the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING based on traditional fairy tales. On the cognitive level, the above-mentioned primary metaphor is grounded in our everyday experience and is directly related to vision. Harrison (2017) considers it in connection with the traditional Western philosophical concepts: “KNOWING IS SEEING is aligned with the classical Western concept of God (omniscience being one of God’s omni-powers) (Harrison, 2017:45).

(4) “**You see**, Caroline,” Miss Spink said, getting Coraline's name wrong“ (Gaiman, 2003: 3)

Here, knowledge is conceptualized in relation to the power of vision. However, there was a case, where the target domain of taste was interpreted in terms of the same source (TASTE IS SEEING). On the other hand, the mapping usually incorporates the negative aspects:

(5) “It **tasted bright green** and **vaguely chemical**.” (Gaiman, 2003: 50)

5.4. *Conceptualization of Life and Death.*

The empirical data demonstrated the following cases of metaphors related to life and death:

- (6) “So Coraline **set off to explore for it**, so that she knew where it was, to keep away from it properly...” (Gaiman, 2003: 5)
- (7) “She wants me to hurt you, to keep you here forever, so that **you can never finish the game**, and she will win”. (Gaiman, 2003: 112)
- (8) “**This is our staging post**. From here, we three **will set out for uncharted lands**, and what comes after no one alive can say ...” (Gaiman, 2003: 144)
- (9) “**The three of them came to a small wooden bridge over a stream**. They stopped there and turned and waved, and Coraline waved back.” (Gaiman, 2003: 146)

It can be maintained that example 7 represents the metaphor LIFE IS A GAME. The final game between the other mother and Coraline should have decided not only her future but the fate of the ghost children and her parents. Interestingly, example 8 corresponds to the metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY. The word “chart” (v) can be defined as marking a particular land area on a map. Thus, the phrase “set out for uncharted lands” can be interpreted as an extended metaphor for death. Of no less importance is example 9- DEATH IS CROSSING A BRIDGE ON THE RIVER can be thought of as a representation of a cultural metaphor. Lakoff and Turner (1989) discuss similar examples in connection with the formation of novel metaphors (the example where the author (Horace) employs metaphorical elaboration– “eternal exile on the raft” (Lakoff and Turner, 1989:67). We think that the conceptualization of death as crossing the stream can be attributed to the mythological representation of death in Indo-European traditions: the Styx from Greek mythology which “formed the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead – Hades” (Hellenic Museum, 2017), Gjöll from Norse mythology - the river in Hel (underworld) “which was spanned by a bridge named Gjallar-brú” (McCoy, n.d.) serving as the border between two worlds. Due to the common occurrence of this theme, we maintain that the above-mentioned metaphor is culturally motivated.

In addition, the source domain of JOURNEY was employed to define the target domain of SHOPPING (SHOPPING IS A JOURNEY):

- (10) “Her mother still hadn't returned from her **shopping expedition**.” (Gaiman, 2003: 49)

In this example, the mapping is more obvious due to the fact that expedition refers to the specific type of journey, namely “an organized journey for a particular purpose” (Cambridge Dictionary), which reinforces the comical image of the character.

5.5. Time Metaphors

We have identified several time-related metaphors, including TIME IS EXTENSION, TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, TIME IS A LOCATION, etc. However, TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT demonstrated some interesting realizations, such as:

- (11) „...and nowhere to go and the **day drags on forever?**” (Gaiman, 2003: 119)

Unlike other examples that were identified in the corpus, the above-given linguistic expression highlights the existence of negative connotations. This again proves the theory proposed by Forceville (2016) that metaphorical mapping also includes the transfer of connotation from source to target. Specifically, here, we can observe the annoyance of the character in the phrase ‘drags on’.

5.6. Other EVENT STRUCTURE metaphors

In the previous section of the article, we have already discussed one of the EVENT STRUCTURE metaphors. However, we have also identified others, such as STATES ARE LOCATIONS, ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELED MOTIONS ON A PATH, OUTSIDE THINGS ARE LARGE MOVING OBJECTS, OUTSIDE THINGS ARE LIQUIDS, etc. Interestingly, in one of our studies (Peradze, 2021) we proposed the significance of conceptual metaphor MANNER OF ACTION IS MANNER OF MOTION in children’s fantasy. We think that it can serve as one of the means for reflecting the characteristic features of heroes and heroines. In our database, we have identified some significant cases in relation to *Coraline* and the main antagonist. In the case of *Coraline*, the following word combinations have been employed: *racing pell-mell*, *slipped out*, *jerked her head out of the way*, *shovelled the food*, *sparing a hasty glance*. Apparently, the author employs expressions where the manner of motion incorporates the aspect of speed. On the contrary, to characterize the other mother we have found the phrases such as:

- (12) “The other mother stood **very still**, giving nothing away, lips tightly closed. **She might have been a wax statue. Even her hair had stopped moving**” (Gaiman, 2003: 130)

- (13) “The other mother **remained statue-still**, but a hint of a smile crept back onto her face”.
(Gaiman, 2003: 130)

Being unable to express emotions and the absence of soul is reflected not only in the gaze but her posture and actions.

6. Conceptual Metonymy in “Coraline”

6.1. Metonymies – PART FOR WHOLE and ORGAN FOR ABILITY

The empirical data showed the prevalence of conceptual metonymies PART FOR WHOLE and ORGAN FOR ABILITY.

- (14) “Fifty little **red eyes stared** back at her”(Gaiman, 2003: 30)
- (15) “She could not **take her eyes** from the floor beneath her”(Gaiman, 2003: 113)
- (16) „... she couldn’t **feel** other mother's **blank black eyes on her back.**” (Gaiman, 2003: 128)

In example 14, eyes metonymically stand for a living creature, otherwise, part of the body stands for the whole body. On the contrary, Example 15 corresponds to the metonymy ORGAN FOR ABILITY, specifically, vision and attention. However, the following linguistic expression (16) can be considered as the case of metaphonymy (Goossens, 1990). The phrase – *to feel someone’s eyes on sb* is of metonymic nature. In this case, eyes stand for vision, and attention, but the word ‘empty’ points to the container schema and the existence of a metaphor as well. In other words, the other mother’s ‘empty’, emotionless gaze was directed at Coraline. We should also mention that predominantly, identified metonymies are related to eyes and vision. The given elements also assist the author in retaining the atmosphere of fear and tension.

6.2. Metonymies related to ‘fear’

The linguistic expressions related to fear are mostly metonymic in nature. Generally, emotion-related metonyms can be divided into different categories: THE BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS OF AN EMOTION STANDS FOR THE EMOTION and THE PHYSICAL REACTIONS OF AN EMOTION STANDS FOR THE EMOTION (Zibin & Hamdan, 2019; Kövecses, 1990). The database showed the existence of fear-related metonymies demonstrating both physiological and behavioural effects. For instance:

- (17) “The cat did not resist. It simply **trembled.**” (Gaiman, 2003: 125)
- (18) “**The black cat was huddled in the farthest corner of the room,** the pink tip of its tongue showing, **its eyes wide.**” (Gaiman, 2003: 136)

7. Conclusion

Based on the empirical data, we have identified metaphors such as EYES ARE THE CONTAINER OF SOUL, EYES ARE CONTAINERS OF EMOTION, DEATH IS A JOURNEY, MANNER OF ACTION IS MANNER OF MOTION, etc. The given metaphors are significant for their cultural value as we saw in the case of DEATH-related linguistic expression and its connection with European mythology.

The great majority of identified conceptual metaphors were universal, however, their contextual realization was of no less significance. For instance, the conceptualization of eyes as containers of emotions and soul, representing the absence of soul by black button eyes is quite unique and novel. The same can be said about the MANNER OF ACTION IS MANNER OF MOTION metaphor, which described the attributes of characters, and their personalities and served as one of the distinguishing features.

As for conceptual metonymy, PART FOR WHOLE, ORGAN FOR ABILITY, and REACTIONS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR EMOTION were detected and analyzed in terms of their significance and value.

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