



## Revisiting the Role of Social Dimensions in Metaphorical Conceptualization: Implications for Comparative Literature and Translation

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### ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural and within-culture variation in conceptual metaphors is a much-debated subject in Cognitive Linguistics research. The theory points out that such variation occurs on a series of dimensions, like social, ethnic, regional, stylistic and subcultural dimensions. The social dimensions consist of the separation of society into people, youthful and old, and working class and average workers. The purpose of this study was to undertake a deeper look at the distinctions caused in metaphorical conceptualization due to the attitude each individual or group of individuals possesses, especially with regard to the economic status of each group. To this end, twenty individuals were selected, with the only variable existing amongst them being their financial status. Each person was asked to write three paragraphs on three separate topics, adding up to sixty paragraphs, in an attempt to try and determine differences in metaphorical conceptualization. The results reveal interesting insights largely supporting the thinking in the theory on individual and cross-cultural variation in Conceptual Metaphors rooted in social agents' financial statuses. Other research like the current one would contribute to our Cognitive Linguistics understanding of the social dimensions of Conceptual Metaphor variation and universality.

### BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

According to established Cognitive Linguistics literature, metaphors are engrained into linguistic meaning-making language and are an inseparable part of most acts of linguistic communication. Even laymen with no theoretical knowledge of metaphors can still utilize and identify Conceptual Metaphors (henceforth CMs) with ease and accuracy. A large number of CMs revolving around human bodily functions and neurological aspects are universal across many languages (Kövecses, 2005). The neurological parts of the brain corresponding to the concept “up”, also correspond to the concept “more”, making grounds for the UP IS MORE metaphor (Lakoff, 2008). Likewise, the ANGER IS HEAT metaphor exists in many languages due to its being rooted in human physiology, FEAR IS LOSS OF COLOUR being of a similar nature. Other examples evidencing the universality of metaphors are more common in daily life; however, variation in metaphorical conceptualization should also be taken into account, whether it be within-culture or cross-cultural. Metaphor variation can come in many shapes and forms. Kövecses (2005) sheds light on this by arguing how a sole focus on ethnic dimensions may point to diverse ethnic classes building their metaphorical conceptualizations of a certain target domain on different source domains that are, nonetheless, congruent. One illustration of this, he contends, is

the Black American English usage of ‘nitty-gritty’ (meaning ‘important’) versus the standard white use of ‘bottom-line’ for IMPORTANCE as target domain. In both, we have the metaphor IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL at work; however, these vary in clear ways from the specific-level source domains. The ethnic factor may likewise assume a significant part in making “talking styles” that are exceptionally metaphorical. One such talking style is “playing the handfuls” in Black English Vernacular (Kochman, 1981).

Essentially, embracing a regional point of view, we can note dialects like Dutch and those like Afrikaans that are derived from it, spoken in certain regions of South Africa. Dirven (1994) investigates this circumstance, analysing newspapers circulated in Afrikaans and exploring the regular metaphors in them in an attempt to see what degree of overlap there is between these metaphors and those manifested in equivalent Dutch texts. His investigation is a systematic comparison of normally and conventionally used Dutch and new Afrikaans metaphors. In the depiction of “nature” metaphors, he calls attention to the common metaphors incorporating pictures of water, light, shadow, lightning, tremor, sand, stars, wind, and mists and to the fact that this represent the normal naturally received and cognitive setting of the Low Countries (Dirven, 1994) or other northern European countries. A strange element of Dutch nature metaphors is that they never rely on animals. Contrary to this moderately

quiet and peaceful characteristic environment, Dirven locates metaphors in new Afrikaans Dutch, bringing together both different sorts of animals and strong images of nature. The social dimension further uncovers a great deal, for instance, in Japanese culture, where ladies appear to be metaphorically conceptualized in manners by which men are not (Hiraga, 1991). In Japanese, it is standard procedure to portray ladies as items; a similar conceptualization doesn't extend to Japanese men. Hiraga (1991: 39–40) supports this using examples:

- *WOMEN ARE A COMMODITY: Ano onna-wa metal no mono da.*
- *That lady TOP I(M)- GEN thing be – PRST (That lady is mine.)*

Leading social figures in cultures, i.e. presidents, media stars, authors and writers, can manifest broad individual variety in their metaphor use. This is the individual measurement, as fittingly portrayed by Kövecses (2005). He focuses to Time Magazine's depiction of the metaphors that the telecaster Dan Rather of CBS utilized in his 2001 political race inclusion (Time, November 20, 2001):

*The presidential campaign is "... still hotter than a Laredo parking lot."*

- *Bush "has run through Dixie like a big wheel through a cotton field.", "... will be madder than a rained-on rooster..." , ". is sweeping through the South like a tornado through a trailer park."*

One can deduce that Rather uses these metaphors in a way that is relatively unique to his own discourse. Metaphor-based variation in cultures, the variation in metaphorical conceptualization, have been reported in prominent work by Kövecses (2000), Kövecses (2005) and a number of studies conducted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), lending support to the fact that variation exists not only on a collective social inter-cultural basis, but that it exists on an inter-individual basis too, as seen in Dan Rather's case above. Other sources of individuals in different cultures deploying cognitive and metaphorically unique patterns are rooted in the professional, entertainment, social, and domestic context the person is exposed to in the long-term, giving rise to the formation to subconscious patterns of metaphor use otherwise not explainable. For example, someone having been accustomed to regularly exercising a certain sport may come up with metaphors that have as their source domains the concepts, tools, rules and actions to do with that sport (Kövecses, 2014, 2005, 2000).

In an experiment by Kövecses (2005), two groups of twenty individuals were asked to produce a written essay of one to two pages on 'life'; the first group comprised Hungarians, the second one Americans residing in Hungary. As expected, the distinction in their metaphor conceptualization was extremely dramatic, with the Hungarians using things like STRUGGLE/WAR, COMPROMISE and JOURNEY as source domains, while the Americans leaned more toward source domains such as PRECIOUS POSSESSION, GAME, and JOURNEY, demonstrating that cross-cultural variation is not just a result of deficiency in source domains but also a preferential choice by

individuals. Other instances of different metaphor conceptualizations are more complex.

In an "In Vivo" study conducted by Boroditsky and Ramscar (2002), passengers on a train were asked to work out and verbalize how they were conceptualising time. It is vital to note that the train ride is an actual embodiment or rather a personification of one of the source domains for time: TIME PASSING IS A MOVING OBSERVER, as in "We're coming up on Christmas" (as opposed to the metaphor TIME PASSING IS A MOVING OBJECT, as in "Christmas is coming up on us"). In this experiment, the train passengers were presented with the following situation: they were told that a particular meeting lined up for the upcoming Wednesday was rescheduled and moved forward two days. They were then asked the question: "*What day is the meeting, now that it has been rescheduled?*"

If the respondents were making use of the MOVING OBSERVER metaphor in their cognitive hypothesizing, they should have responded that the meeting was lined up for Friday; on the other hand, in case they used the MOVING OBJECT metaphor, they were supposed to say it was moved to Monday instead. This was fuelled by the fact that the moving observer would reach farther areas or points on the journey as she or he moves forward. That is, if the meeting was rescheduled from Wednesday, then 'forward' must point to Friday. However, if the person uses the MOVING OBJECT metaphor in her or his conceptualization, 'forward' is defined with regards to the object that moved toward the static ego, and in that case 'moving forward' would mean "closer" to the stationary ego. This must result in these individuals saying that the meeting was moved to Monday. In light of this expected cognitive path, the overall majority of the respondents in this interesting study by Boroditsky and Ramscar (2002) responded that the meeting was moved to Friday.

This shows that the embodied experience of the train ride plays an important role in the conceptualization people come up with, making them conceptualize time metaphorically; more generally, their understanding appears to be dependent on a specific embodied experience in context. Again, as a core postulate and mainstay of Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, these experiments that Boroditsky and Ramscar (2002) carried out provide clear support for the embodied nature of meaning and thought. The disparity of the conceptualization of metaphors can be within-culture as well (Kövecses, 2005). Within-culture variation according to Kövecses occurs along social, ethnic, regional, style, and subcultural dimensions. Social dimensions include the differentiation of society into men and women, young and old, and middle-class and working-class.

As illustrated in Kolodny (1975), for instance, American men conceptualized a frontier as a virgin land to be taken, while American women had an inclination to conceptualize this target domain as a garden to be cultivated. Taking all this into account and considering the very social circumstances individuals live in, it is to be expected that social elements play a significant role in metaphor variation; and somewhere at the centre of these elements, we arrive at economic status as well as a very important driving force triggering such

variation. With target domains relating to the quality of life, the effects of financial status are easily attested to and clearly pronounced.

## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

In this spirit, and against this background, the purpose of this study was to observe variations in metaphor conceptualization as a result of an individual being conditioned into such metaphor use by a certain quality of (socio-)economic status. This is aligned with a series of studies by Perkins (2013) concluding that having a lower socioeconomic status (SES) has a direct effect on the stress conditions that children live in, which in turn, impedes language development in young children. These findings by Perkins et al stress that children with poor phonemic awareness skills, despite higher SES backgrounds, have increased Perisylvian function during a task of reading. In Perkin's findings, this did not prove to be the case in experiments with both low SES and low phonemic awareness, implying that social, cognitive and underlying neurobiological influences on reading development are inter-related in fundamental ways. This clear shortfall shown by the lower SES children can be a result of poor cognitive conceptualization of other concepts as well.

In previous studies of social class and speech systems, Bernstein (1958, 1960, 1961, 1962 a, b) insists that class differences in modes of verbal expression are not only lexical but also grammatical in nature, in the sense that working-class speech is selected from a narrower range of alternative and secondary structures, not merely applying to words and grammar but also to concepts. A further ground-breaking study on the limitations of low SES individuals by Hart and Risley (1995) showed that by age 3, the average Verbal IQ was 117 in the higher SES children compared to 79 in those from more challenging environments. By age 4, the investigators found that children from wealthier families would have heard ~48 million words, whereas those from less affluent families had heard only ~13 million. The primary explanation for this picture emerging is that these socioeconomic and their respective ability limitations directly correspond to those at the plane of conceptual thought and cognition.

The primary objective of this study was to probe and discern the different ways in which people of different modes of upbringing, along with different attitudes and family backgrounds develop a variety of different conceptualizations for abstract ideas and conceptual metaphors in general.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, twenty individuals were selected. Care was exercised in making sure that all these individuals had identical ethnic and religious backgrounds, and came from identical geographical regions with the sociolinguistic style used by them being also roughly identical. That is to say, the only differentiating variable amongst these individuals was the financial statuses naturally existing across them. Of these twenty people, ten came from a family with a high financial status, while the remaining ten came from lower income families.

For tagging and coding the data, the study had recourse to and was based on the established model of emotion metaphors including ANGER IS HEAT, LUST IS HUNGER, HAPPINESS IS UP, LOVE IS A NATURAL FORCE, etc. (Kövecses, 2010, 2005, 2000; Lakoff and Johnson, 1987). Each individual in the study was asked to write about three different topics, namely Happiness, Life, and Success. These three concepts were selected due to the direct correlation they had with the quality of their lives, with their economic status being the core of the study. Subjects were also given two separate categories of source domains, to choose and determine which category they used to conceptualize each topic with more frequency.

After receiving the sixty paragraphs, the conceptual metaphors were identified using the MIP protocol (Pragglejaz Group, 2007); each phrase was analysed in order to verify whether the meaning was literal or metaphorical. The figurative meaning was then examined. Finally, the results of the two groups were set as parallels to one another, to make an attempt at distinguishing the main differences in conceptualization.

## RESULTS

Due to constraints of size and volume, not all instances have been included in the results. Table 1 includes the principal conceptual metaphors and their frequencies in each study group. The table will be followed by a number of actual linguistic examples from the data elicited from the groups.

## HAPPINESS

### Group one (Test subject R)

*Happiness is like when you feel the smell of the first rain in the spring, happiness is the pain in your feet after a long walk with a loved one, happiness can even be the feeling of enthusiasm and eagerness for work, learning, and LIVING. Happiness can't be bought, it can only be made in an individual's mind.*

### Group two (Test Subject E)

*Happiness is like a great friend with a great sense of responsibility and full of energy*

*Happiness can take you to the moon without any jet or rockets*

*Happiness makes you love who you are or even the others and it brings you mercy*

*Happiness is like a drug that makes you forget the toughness of life*

*But without sadness you still have an empty space in your life*

## LIFE

### Group one (Test subject H)

*I think life is like a business. In this world we born to plant our products and our next generation harvest (use) them.*

**Table 1.** Conceptual metaphors and their frequency in the study

Conceptual metaphor	Frequency in group one (good economic status)	Frequency in group two (average economic status)	Examples by high frequency group	Examples by the low frequency group
Success is power	8	0	Success is the power that helps us continue our life.	—
Success is respect	4	0	Success is being respected by others.	—
Success is survival/comfort	4	9	It's the ability to be comfortable	Surviving in life means success.
Life is a short moment	2	9	The pages of our life are limited.	Your time is limited.
Life is a gift	0	8	Life is a gift only given to you once.	—
Life is a game	8	4	We're framed-up to play it.	Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.
Happiness is hope	4	8	Happiness is the hope to do more and more good things.	Happiness is the hope to keep on going.
Happiness is light	3	9	Happiness is the sun shining through the cloud.	Happiness is like sunrise after the darkest night.
Happiness is good flavor	0	8	Happiness is eating sweet ice cream on a hot summer day.	—
Life is a bumpy road	8	8	Life is road line with tears.	Life goes up and down, gets fast and slow.
Life is a memory	0	8	Life is going to be a memory, so do your best to be known as attractive as possible.	—
Life is result of your own action	2	6	Life is a piece of paper, and we all get different pens.	Life is an empty bag which can be packed by knives or flowers. You should decide how to use it.
Life is joy	8	6	The most important thing in this game is enjoying.	The main point of life is to enjoy it.
Happiness is romance	4	8	It is like the first thing for your heart.	It is long walk with a loved one.
Happiness is freedom	2	2	It is having freedom.	In that way, you are free of involvement.
Happiness is beauties of nature	0	6	It is like the softness of the bare soil.	—

Below are some samples on each topic from the linguistic expressions used by both groups

*Life is a game, who try hard, gain victory and if you indifference you feel sorry.*

**Group two (Test subject R)**

*Life is a journey with problems to solve and lessons to learn and experiences to enjoy, a journey which must be traveled no matter how bad the roads are. Life is a journey between human being and being human and we should try to take at least one step every day to cover the distance. Life is a journey not a destination, let's enjoy the ride.*

**SUCCESS**

**Group one (Test subject C)**

*Success is like growth of a fruit and tasting the ripe one. It is like throwing the darts to the middle of targets. It is like having the best view of a sky to flying to the target clouds.*

**Group two (Test subject K)**

*Success is like having a mirror for yourself in your own mind, one which tells you to appreciate your blessings, one*

*that keeps telling you: Don't do anything unless you're all in it, warns you to not take even the small and simple things of your life for granted, one that teaches you to embrace yourself with all your flaws and powers.*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As shown by the results above, a remarkable distinction between the frequencies of these conceptual metaphors is evident. Much of this can be credited to a significant contrast between the cognitive aspects of language in these individuals, which stems from the individuals' differential economic attitudes, lifestyles and mentalities, further reinforcing Kövecses's (2005) view on the distinction in conceptualization between the middle-class and the working-class.

For instance, the second group (average) were more than twice as likely to conceptualize the abstract concept SUCCESS with source domains such as SURVIVAL and COMFORT. Similarly, the average income group was twice as likely to conceptualize HAPPINESS with source domains such as HOPE. Likewise, the second group were more than twice as likely to conceptualize the target domain LIFE with the SHORT MOMENT and NATURE source domains. Conversely, target domains such as SUCCESS were approached much more often with source domains such as POWER and RESPECT by the first group. In the same fashion, the higher-income group had the tendency to conceptualize LIFE utilizing GAME. We argue that there are two forces feeding into this contrast emerging:

### The Effects of Standards on Metaphor Conceptualization

A pattern that you will notice examining the results exhibited in the table is that most average-income individuals have an inclination to use metaphors of lower standards and higher accessibility. On the other side of the spectrum, the higher-income group tends to make use of conceptual metaphors with higher standards and lower accessibility. For instance, an individual with lower economic status is more likely to conceptualize target domains such as SUCCESS with source domains such as COMFORT and LACK OF PROBLEMS. On the contrary, individuals in the first group are more accustomed to utilizing source domains such as POWER and RESPECT for metaphor conceptualization. Likewise, the person from the second group will conceptualize LIFE with source domains such as GIFT and SHORT MOMENT, while the first group will conceptualize LIFE with source domains such as JOY more often than not.

One can assume the reason for this contrast is the lower standard of the average-income group. In other words, the definition of something that makes a person with average income feel HAPPY differs and falls into a lower standard classification compared to a person with high income. Similarly, the definition of what high-income individuals need to consider themselves successful varies from a low-income individual, and is of a higher standard.

These cognitive bases of social perception, i.e. the linguistic manifestations of socially shaped views according

to well-entrenched cognitive templates of reality that are, at the same time, socially layered, find echoes in sociocultural, cognitive sociolinguistics, and sociolinguistic and pragmatic variation studies (e.g. Eckert, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; McConnell, 2014; Milroy, 2004; Putz, 2014; Schneider, 2014).

### The Effects of Availability of Source Domains on Metaphor Conceptualizations

Metaphor conceptualization based on availability is a topic rarely discussed in cognitive linguistics despite its numerous applications. It can be said that individuals tend to use source domains that they interact with in their daily lives for metaphor conceptualization. As an example, the expression "It's raining cats and dogs" is very common in European countries, while in middle-eastern countries a completely cognitively shared equivalent expression for it cannot be found. This can be credited to the geographic qualities and the environmental conditions each country possesses (Kövecses, 2010, 2005). A person living in Europe can effortlessly conceptualize rain with "cats and dogs" due to the magnitude of the rains she/he has witnessed, while a person living in a middle-eastern country cannot do so, resulting in a cognitive gap in her/his source domains. Similarly, the Portuguese language is extremely rich in conceptual metaphors utilizing animals, while European countries don't have as much variation and diversity in conceptual metaphors including animals. This is due to the large scale availability of animals and the rich wild life present in Brazil. Expressions such as "Pagar o pato" (to pay the duck) meaning facing the consequences of your actions fall into this bracket. Low-income individuals mostly use source domains such as LIGHT, BEAUTIES OF NATURE, and GOOD FLAVOR, due to the availability of these source domains to these individuals. Conversely, high-income individuals tend to conceptualize abstract concepts using source domains such as POWER and RESPECT.

It must also be noted that individuals of low income are much more conscious of life being finite and the possibility and inevitability of it ending, while the other group does not share this mind-set to the same extent. Furthermore, the second group had a much better grasp in regards to the precious nature of life commonly using source domains such as GIFT, while the second group did not do so. To put it differently, individuals regardless of income can only conceptualize abstract concepts with source domains they experience and interact with in their daily lives; source domains such as POWER and RESPECT are circumstantial experiences that not every individual of low income has ever had much experience of. In light of this, low-income individuals must resort to the source domains they have experiential knowledge of, as lying much higher on the availability scale; source domains such as CLOUDS, RAIN, GOOD FLAVOR, and LIGHT fall into this category. These social aspects of differential cognition are grounds and call for extensive further research.

It is important to note in closing that these sociological ties with cross-cultural studies in Cognitive Linguistics,

these variable socio-cognitive properties of discourse production and reception in the social classes observed in a culture are all deeply implicated in cross-linguistic work, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies as well. The researchers who study the comparative dimensions of literary production and reception across cultures or the processes involved in the actual conceptual, sociological and cognitive journey of translating the culturally tinged source-language concepts into the equivalent target-language ones will need to accommodate the socio-economic layers of the societies in question and the conceptualization differences that accrue to these instances of social layering. It seems that the picture and the theory of meaning and language undertaken by comparative cognitive linguistics and Comparative Literature, the same naturally extending to Translation Studies too, becomes more complex than was at first thought; if socio-economic status also has bearings on the way nuanced meaning is conceptualized differentially in a culture, then obviously the same should be taken into account when analysing the conceptual metaphors in the respective literary discourses and in the acts of translation between and from these cultures, to allow adequately for the play of context in determining the metaphorical play and status of any metaphorical choice made in text (Steen, 2017).

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