

Universality and cultural variation in metaphor

Zoltán Kövecses
Eötvös Loránd University
Budapest

1. Introduction

To what extent and in what ways is metaphorical thought relevant to an understanding of culture and society?

Challenge:

Can the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor simultaneously explain both universality and diversity in metaphorical thought? (Kövecses, 2005)

- (1) Which metaphors are universal and why?
- (2) What are the dimensions along which metaphors vary?
- (3) Which aspects of metaphor are affected by metaphor variation?
- (4) What are the main causes of variation?

2. Universality in metaphor

Chinese (Yu, 1995, 1998)

HAPPY IS UP

Ta hen gao-xing.
he very high-spirit
He is very high-spirited/happy.

Ta xing congcong de.
he spirit rise-rise PRT
His spirits are rising and rising./He's pleased and excited.

Zhe-xia tiqi le wo-de xingzhi.
this-moment raise ASP my mood
This time it lifted my mood/interest.

Hungarian

HAPPINESS IS UP

Ez a film feldobott.
this the film up-threw-me
This film gave me a high.-This film made me happy.

Majd elszáll a boldogságtól.
almost away-flies-he/she the happiness-from
He/she is on cloud nine.

How is it possible for such different languages and cultures to conceptualize happiness metaphorically in such similar ways?

3. Dimensions of metaphor variation

3.1 Cross-cultural variation

3.1.1 Congruent metaphors

THE ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER

ANGER IS (IN THE) HARA (Matsuki, 1995)

ANGER IS EXCESS QI (Yu, 1995, 1998)

ANGER IS (UNDERSTOOD AS BEING) IN THE HEART (Taylor and Mbense, 1995)

3.1.2 Alternative metaphors

Range of the target

HAPPINESS: UP, LIGHT, FLUID IN A CONTAINER (Kövecses, 1991)

HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART (in Chinese; Yu, 1995, 1998)

LIFE IS A STRUGGLE/ WAR, PRECIOUS POSSESSION, GAME, JOURNEY

LIFE IS A STRING (Riddle (2001)

3.2 Within-culture variation

3.2.1 The social dimension

The men-woman dimension.

WOMEN ARE (SMALL) FURRY ANIMALS (*bunny, kitten*)

WOMEN ARE BIRDS (*bird, chick, hen-party*)

WOMEN ARE SWEET FOOD (*cookie, dish, sweetie pie*)

MEN ARE LARGE FURRY ANIMALS

3.2.2 The regional dimension

American vs. British English (Kövecses, 2000b)

Afrikaans vs. Dutch (Dirven 1994)

3.2.3 The style dimension

Audience, topic, setting, medium.

3.2.4 The subcultural dimension

DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS
DEPRESSION IS HEAVY
DEPRESSION IS DESCENT/DOWN
DEPRESSION IS A CAPTOR (McMullen and Conway, 2001)

3.2.5 The individual dimension

Love relationship: “pushing a wagon uphill” LOVE IS A JOURNEY

4. Aspects of metaphor involved in variation

- (1) Experiential basis
- (2) Source domain
- (3) Target domain
- (4) Relationship between the source and the target
- (5) Metaphorical linguistic expressions
- (6) Mappings
- (7) Entailments
- (8) Blends
- (9) Nonlinguistic realization
- (10) Cultural models

Which of these aspects are involved in metaphor variation, and in what ways?

4.1 Source

Construal of motion in English and Turkish Özcaliskan (2002)

4.2 Entailments

English and Zulu: FIRE as a source domain for anger

In Zulu: *extinguish* somebody’s anger by pouring water on them (Taylor and Mbense, 1998)

4.3 Linguistic expression

	Word form	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning	Conceptual metaphor
Most frequent case	Different	same	same	same
Less frequent case	Different	different	same	same
Least frequent case	Different	different	same	different

4.4 Correlations in experience

4.5 Cultural models

5. Causes of metaphor variation

5.1 Differential experience

5.1.1 Awareness of differential contexts

Physical environment.

Social context.

Cultural context.

Communicative situation.

5.1.1.1 Cultural context

THE ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER.

Euro-American tradition (Geeraerts and Grondelaers, 1995): The humoral view.

Japan (Matsuki, 1995): *hara (hone, tatemae)*

China (King, 1989 and Yu, 1995, 1998): *nu (qi)*

5.1.1.2 Communicative situation

“Cougars *drown* Beavers,” “Cowboys *corral* Buffaloes,” “Air Force *torpedoes* the Navy,” and “Clemson *cooks* Rice” (Aitchison, 1987: 143).

5.1.2 History

Hungarian:

LIFE IS WAR and LIFE IS A COMPROMISE (Köves, 2002)

American English:

LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION and LIFE IS A GAME (Köves, 2002)

Sylvia Plath’s metaphors.

Hemingway’s symbolic system.

5.1.3 Human concern

DEPRESSION IS CAPTOR.

5.2 Cognitive preferences and styles

5.2.1 Experiential focus

Anger in English and Chinese.

ANGER IS HEAT vs. ANGER IS PRESSURE

The conceptualization of anger in terms of heat in English through time (Gevaert, 2001)
The “pressure of coherence” principle (Kövecses, 2005).

5.2.2 Metaphor and metonymy

Metaphor vs. metonymy in English and Malay (Charteris-Black, 2003).
MANNER IS TASTE: *honey-tongued* and *lidah manis* (‘tongue sweet’).

5.2.3 Blending

God, he was so mad I could see the smoke coming out of his ears.

ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER
Fauconnier and Turner (2002): “double-scope network.”

God, was he ever mad. I could see the smoke coming out of his ears – I thought his hat would catch fire!

A submapping of ANGER IS HEAT: INTENSITY (OF EMOTION) IS (DEGREE OF) HEAT.

6. Conclusions

First, metaphor variation is just as important as universal embodiment.

Second, the basic components of such a theory: dimensions of variation, aspects of variation, causes of variation, and the interaction of the causes that produce variation with universal embodiment that produces universality in metaphorical conceptualization.

Third, cultural-cognitive view is a natural and necessary complement of the experiential view.

Fourth, much of the work in cognitive linguistics can be neatly accommodated in such a model of metaphor variation.

Fifth, a cognitive-cultural theory of metaphor should replace purely cognitive or purely cultural theories of metaphor (see Kövecses, 2005, 2006).

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