

## Current Trends and Methodological Approaches in the Analysis of Metaphors in Religious Discourse: From Idealized Cognitive Models to Multimodality

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore some of the current theoretical and methodological trends employed in the analysis of metaphors in religious discourse under the umbrella of Cognitive Linguistics. First, this study reviews a series of theoretical tenets of Cognitive Linguistics towards the study of literary texts, namely Cognitive Stylistics and Multimodality. Then, some of the most important studies of metaphors in religious scriptures are reviewed within three contexts: Judeo-Christian, Islamic and Buddhist. Finally, some proposals for the methodological analysis of metaphors in religious texts are presented. Ultimately, we argue that evolution from traditional cognitivist analyses (following Idealized Cognitive Models) towards multimodal analyses of metaphors is necessary to obtain a more holistic image of the events.

**Keywords:** metaphor, religious discourse, cognitive linguistics, multimodality, idealized cognitive models

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to compile information on the current trends in the analysis of metaphors in religious discourses. This is intended to serve as the starting point for further research in the field. Religious discourse has been thoroughly from many different approaches (Discourse Analysis, Theology, Cognitive Linguistics, etc.). In this regard, metaphors have been researched in the main texts of Buddhism, Islam as well as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Among Judeo-Christian texts, the Christian Bible has been the most explored. In the case of Islam, it is the Qur'an the text that triggers a great deal of studies. Finally, among the Buddhist texts that have been thoroughly explored, the most important one is the Lotus Sutra, worshiped in the Mahayana tradition. The study of these metaphors, however, is only performed from a linguistic point of view. In this regard, the study of how these texts are reinterpreted in -other- spoken genres opens the door for new multimodal analyses to be conducted.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### On Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Stylistics

Cognitive Linguistics emerged during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to the postulates of Generativism, wherein language is envisaged as a system of arbitrary symbols governed by mathematical rules. The syntax is thus the primary object of study in Generative Linguistics, and meaning (or vocabulary) is merely tangential in the study of language (Ungerer & Schmid 1996; Ruiz de Mendoza 2001). This new approach takes meaning in its core and is based on the experimental analysis of data instead of on raw logic and mathematical rules (Hilferty 2001).

One of the main fields of research in Cognitive Linguistics is the study of what Lakoff (1987) calls Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM). Moreover, a new framework within the Cognitive Linguistics paradigm has appeared recently: Cognitive Stylistics or Poetics. This approach allows the interpretation of literary works from a cognitive perspective. Some important researchers in this field are Freeman D.C. (1995) and Freeman M. (2000, 2002). Also, Peña (1998, 2011) has analyzed some works under the umbrella of Cognitive Stylistics. In her articles, she attempts to analyze literary works from a cognitive point of view. With this, she sheds light on the understanding of these works with the analysis of the ICMs present in the texts.

### On Multimodal Metaphors

A more recent approach towards metaphors is that of multimodality. Multimodality essentially claims that all language, and consequently, all meaning, is conveyed through the combination of a multiplicity of modes that co-occur in a given instance (Kress, 2010). This approach, which considers metaphors as conveyed through different semiotic resources, has received ample attention recently, especially in the work of Forceville and Uriós-Aparisi (2009).

### Review of previous studies of metaphors in Judeo-Christian texts

The study of metaphors in Christian texts is probably the most extended one within the analysis of religious discourse. Among the wide range of articles that somehow deal with Christian metaphors, Erussard's (1997) is quite a practical example of what the analysis of a metaphor in a religious text should be. Erussard examines Lakoff's theory on cognitive metaphor to apply it to one of the sayings in the Bible –*you are the salt of the earth* Mt. 5:13. The results of the analysis reveal that this sentence is a drastic redefinition through the patriarchal Jewish conceptual system of an old Semitic mother-centered metaphor. This shows that different signs might be reinterpreted in new cultural conceptualizations, even though the experiential basis is the same.

Another interesting analysis within the Judeo-Christian tradition is the one by Jäkel (2002). Taking into account his own theory of the nine hypotheses of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (Jäkel 1997), he reinterprets the commonly researched instances of the JOURNEY metaphor with its underlying PATH schema using the context of the Bible.

Sztajer (2005) also provides an interesting insight on how metaphors are related to religion. Unlike previous studies, Sztajer does not focus so much on Christianity but on the relation between metaphor and religion in general. Sztajer claims that metaphors dealing with religion cannot be understood in terms of ordinary metaphors. In other words, “religious metaphors involve a ‘sacral domain’ which is difficult to compare to different domains or similar types” (Sztajer 2005: 51-52).

## Review of previous studies of metaphors in Islamic texts

The Islamic tradition has also been analyzed cognitively in terms of metaphors. One of the most detailed works on metaphors in Islamic text is the one conducted by El-Sarif (2011). This author makes a complete and exhaustive exploration of the proverbs of Prophet Muhammad. This analysis is also anchored by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of cognitive metaphors. El-Sarif's study aims to demonstrate us of metaphorical constructions by Prophet Muhammad through the introduction of concepts such as "Islam and faith, rulership and Islamic laws, and rituals and unlawful practices among many other notions" (El-Sarif 2011: 3). Finally, this study also tries to establish the persuasive impact of these metaphors. He also provides an extensive list of the explicit metaphors and metonymies encountered in the Qur'an.

Following Jäkel's (2002) study on metaphors in Christianity, Shokr (2006) analyzes the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY in the Qur'an. He affirms that this metaphor is one of the most recurrent in the Islamic text from which some other related metaphors are derived. Again, the use of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) and Lakoff and Turner's theories (1989) are fundamental.

In another study, Shokr (2006), looks at the JOURNEY metaphor as it is used in the Qur'an. This metaphor, in turn, constructs a dichotomy between distinct approaches to life: moral versus immoral lives; the Straight Path versus the crooked evil path; righteous versus wicked travelers; and supporters versus obstructors of travelers.

## Metaphor and Buddhism

We have explored how metaphors are dealt with in Judeo-Christian and Islamic studies. However, when it comes to Buddhism, not many articles are found.

Among the few texts, Wachowski (2010) applies Jäkel's (1997) model of mental activity to the Buddhist metaphor of self. However, the approach to metaphor in this paper is not as direct as the ones previously reviewed.

Wei-lun Lu and Chiang (2007), on the other hand, explore conceptual metaphors present in one of the most revered texts in Buddhism: the Heart Sutra. They explore these metaphors at micro and macro levels by looking at the Buddhist concept of EMPTINESS, and by analyzing metaphors based on this concept such as FORM IS EMPTY and EMPTINESS IS FORM. Then, they try to show the similarities between Buddhism and cognitive philosophy.

## Methodological Approaches

In this section, several methodological approaches towards the study of metaphors are put forward.

In order to analyze metaphors in religious texts, some works in Cognitive Linguistics need to be taken into account: Lakoff (1987), Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Johnson (1987), Ruiz de Mendoza (1996, 1999) or Peña (1997, 2003).

Lakoff (1987) argues that ICMs represent the reality of the organization of knowledge. In other words, ICMs are cognitive structures that contribute to showing reality under a certain standpoint, resulting in an idealization of reality. According to Lakoff, four kinds of structuring principles can be established:

- Propositional structures
- Image-schematic structures
- Metaphoric mappings

- Metonymic mappings

Similarly, Ruiz de Mendoza (1996) differentiates between *operational* and *non-operational* cognitive models. Metaphor and metonymy would be *operational* which use propositional structures and image-schemas (*non-operational* cognitive models). In another paper, Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez (2003) further argue that metaphor and metonymy may be disassembled into cognitive operations that are more basic.

In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor and metonymy are conceptual mechanisms used in everyday speech in order to communicate ideas. A metaphor is seen as a mapping or set of correspondences across conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Two main elements are necessary: the source and the target domain. The conceptual structure of the source is employed to refer to and comprehend the target. In this regard, Lakoff and Johnson propose a tripartite classification of metaphors:

- Structural metaphors: in these, one concept is metaphorically understood in terms of another. For instance, LOVE IS A DISEASE.
- Orientational metaphors: those which are based on spatial orientation (up-down, front-back, etc.). For instance, GOOD IS UP.
- Ontological metaphors: those metaphors based on the ‘Great Chain of Being’. Lakoff and Turner (1989) refer to the relation between human beings and lower forms of existence. From the highest order to the lowest one: humans, animals, plants, and inanimate substances. An example of this kind of metaphor would be PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

Ruiz de Mendoza and Otal (2002) and Santibáñez (1999) postulate a slight improvement to this classification: they substitute the category of orientational metaphors by image-schematic metaphors. This allows the embracement of not only orientations but also other image-schemas like CONTAINER and PATH.

In another paper, Johnson (1987: xvi) defines image-schemas “as recurring, dynamic patterns of perceptual interactions and motor programs that give coherence and structure to experience”. A series of wide taxonomies have been proposed to classify image-schemas. Peña (1997, 2003) proposes an easier and more straightforward classification. She distinguishes between *basic* and *subsidiary* image schemas. According to her, CONTAINER, PATH, and PART-WHOLE image-schemas are basic and are the ones from which less basic image-schemas are derived. These image schemas will play a very important role in our analysis.

Finally, following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), we can define a metonymy as a mapping within domains. Metonymy has traditionally been classified into three different types:

- Whole for part metonymies: we mention a whole domain to talk about one of its subdomains. An example could be *Spain won the world cup*.
- Part for whole metonymies: we mention a subdomain to talk about the whole domain. For instance, *Give me a hand, please!*
- Part for part metonymies: those in which a part of a domain is used to represent another part. To mention a classical example, *Nixon bombed Hanoi*.

So far, these methods focus on the study of metaphors as monomodal-only-verbal elements. A more recent approach considers metaphors as multimodal elements, in which target domains can be present in different modes at the same time, achieving cross-modal mappings (Fahlebrach 2005). Thus, by

conducting a multimodal analysis and exploring the multiple elements participating in the construction of metaphors, a more general overview may be obtained.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have gone through some examples of analyses of metaphors in different religions. We have seen that those analysis in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions are the most common. works on Buddhism, however, are scarcer. The shared element in most of these papers is the use of the theory of metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics in their analyses. This theory makes up an efficient tool which provides a detailed and reliable analysis of the Idealized Cognitive Models. However, a new approach, multimodality appears to become an alternative to develop more complete analyses of metaphors. Having these ideas in mind, lines for further analysis within religious discourse should include multimodality as their central methodological approach to expand on previous studies.

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